

Old Sleuth Library

Night-Hawk, the Mounted Detective. By Old Sleuth.

This Number contains a Complete Story, Unchanged and Unabridged.

No. 22

{ SINGLE
NUMBER. }

GEORGE MUNRO'S SONS, PUBLISHERS,
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST., NEW YORK.

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Vol. II.

Old Sleuth Library. Issued Quarterly—By Subscription, 25 cents per Annum.
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NIGHT-HAWK,

THE MOUNTED DETECTIVE.

By OLD SLEUTH.



"It's a living girl!" he ejaculated.

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NIGHT-HAWK.

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CHAPTER I.

"WHOA! Badger; easy, old fellow! as I live there's something there!"

A strange and thrilling scene was presented, as the words above quoted fell from the lips of Tom Hawk, otherwise known as Night-Hawk, The Mounted Detective.

Tom was a special, detailed to work up the river shore business, secured by the united efforts of several wealthy residents along the banks of the Hudson.

A large number of robberies had been committed, and it was concluded that there was a regularly organized gang of burglars, formed to "work" country residences; and robberies had become so frequent, and the perpetrators so bold, the people along the river districts lived in a state of terror, as did the good people in the time of the Black Douglass.

The man selected for the duty was a noted detective, who had long been in the government service in the South-west. He had been introduced to the residents by Badger, one of our most noted local officers, as especially fitted by his former service for the duty of trailing down the river district gang; and the daring officer, owing to his name of Hawk, and alertness under the stars, had earned the *sobriquet* of Night-Hawk.

Our hero owned a magnificent Kentucky racer, which he had trained from a colt, and which he had named in honor of his friend, the great city detective, Badger. The man was a wonder when it came to feats of endurance and cunning and daring, and the horse was equally a wonder, owing to his intelligence, and the remarkable manner in which he had been trained.

To see man and horse together one would have been led to think that the sagacious animal understood every word his master said to him; and he had been taught many astonishing tricks, such as never have been witnessed in the circus ring.

Tom Hawk, upon the night when our tale opens, was on a special trail. He had secured certain information which led him to believe

that the gang contemplated an attack on the mansion of a well-known resident, and he had laid his plans to be on deck.

The night was dark, and our hero was slowly riding along the road, when suddenly Badger, his blooded steed, reared high in the air, sent up his ears and snorted with curved neck, indicating that some startling object had come under his gaze.

Quick as a flash, Tom Hawk leaped from his horse, drew his masked-lantern and flashed the sharp ray around, and an instant later bid his horse be still, in the words with which we open our narrative.

A most thrilling discovery was revealed by the masked-lantern; the light fell upon the form of a beautiful girl, the white, rigid face upturned, and presenting a picture that caused the detective to exclaim:

"It's a dead angel!"

Addressing his horse as he cast the rein from his arm, the detective said:

"It's all right, Badger, old boy, and now none of your nonsense, stand still!"

The animal quieted down at once, and stood as docile as a lamb, as the detective advanced, lamp in hand, closer to the body of the dead girl.

Tom, however, encountered a second surprise which caused him to recoil as he would not have recoiled from a more ghastly sight. The beautiful figure opened its eyes as he approached, and he ejaculated:

"It's a living girl!"

In an instant he recovered from his surprise and sprang forward to assist the girl to rise to her feet.

It was a warm night, and she had lain in a cluster of bushes and wild flowers. The detective seized the girl's hand, and assisted her to rise, and at the same moment remarked, in a pleasant tone:

"I reckon you overslept yourself?"

She gazed at him in a startled manner, and did not make any reply, but there was a furtive glance in her beautiful eyes.

"You must look out next time how you lie down to sleep beside the road. I reckon your friends will be worried about you."

The girl still remained silent, but her eyes were fixed upon the face of our hero in a singularly searching manner.

"Come, I will see you to your home," said the detective.

At length the girl's lips parted, and as it afterward appeared, she involuntarily queried:

"Were you with him?"

The detective gazed at her in return in a wondering manner, when she suddenly appeared to recover her fullest keen senses, and said:

"I am much obliged to you, but I can find my way home alone."

Tom, however, had made a singular discovery; his keen eyes discerned that the girl's hand was bruised, her hair disheveled, and there was a bruise on the side of her head, and like a flash it came over his mind that she had not been sleeping, but had fallen amidst the flowers insensible.

Tom was an old-timer. He gave nothing away, but he was not the man to be baffled.

"What scared you, miss?" he asked.

Her face flushed, and she answered quickly:

"Nothing scared me; I was—"

She did not finish the sentence; it was evident that she recoiled from telling a falsehood.

"That's right, my child, do not attempt to deceive me. I know you were not sleeping, you have just recovered from a faint; now, come, tell me what scared you?"

"I will tell you nothing!" and she jerked up her bonnet and walked away.

The detective was mystified. He knew there was something wrong, but he did not attempt to detain her; but he did glance around the spot where she had lain, and his eyes fell upon a little drawing portfolio, and, as he raised it from the ground, a photograph fell out, and, as the detective picked it up and flashed the flame of his lamp upon the pictured face, an exclamation of horror fell from his lips.

In a moment his light was extinguished. He

addressed a few words to his horse Badger, and turned him in beside the road, and on foot, with stealthy step, he followed the direction taken by the girl.

It was but a short distance to the village, and the girl walked rapidly; and arriving in front of a fine-looking house, sought to pass through the gate, when the detective stepped forward and said:

"One moment; here is your portfolio that you left behind."

She received the article without a word, and entered the house.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, I'll be hanged!" muttered the detective, as he turned away. "I think she might have said 'thank you!'"

The girl passed into the house, and our hero returned up the road to where he had left his horse. He had business on hand for the night, but he was determined at some future time to have an interview with her.

There was a deeper mystery connected with the incident than has been disclosed, and the mystery was attached to the finding of the photograph among the articles in the portfolio.

The detective found his horse Badger waiting for him as calmly as though the animal were a human being, and he was leading the noble racer back to the road, when a scud fell upon his ear that caused him to stand. He heard voices of men coming down the road; one word in Badger's ear, and Night-Hawk ran along the border of the road, and soon took up his position in a clump of bushes.

Luck favored him: the men coming along the highway were met just opposite the point where our hero lay in ambush, by a man who came up from the village.

"Hello, Cheesy! what news?"

"I'm expecting to get news from you fellows."

"All calm with us."

"Didn't you meet a man on your way down?"

"No."

"Then I reckon he must have turned off at the lane below."

"Who was the man?"

"That's more than I can tell, but as it's rumored there's a new man working the country road, I thought it might be he."

"You were always suspicious, Cheesy."

"That's so; it stands a man in hand to be suspicious in our delicate trade, but let it go; and now what's the programme for to-night?"

"We've been up and studied the Castle, and we've got all the port holes on our map."

"How much of a garrison is there in the Castle?"

"The old man is home to-night, and he brought up a stranger from the city."

"Did you see the stranger?"

"Yes."

"What is he?"

"A dude."

"Eh? A dude?"

"Yes; a genuine article."

"I don't like that bit of a tip."

"Why not?"

"I've heard this fellow Tom Hawks can get himself up as a parson or a dandy, a sporting man or a merchant, a woman or a lad; they say he's the devil himself!"

"Well, the man up at the Castle is not Tom Hawk."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen him."

"You've seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The last time I was taken to be 'mugged.' He was on hand taking my measure, and you bet I got his at the same time."

"Then you are sure?"

"Yes, I am."

"I tell you, boys, it stands us in hand to go very slow just about now; there's a big excitement on our racket. I've been down at the store, and I've heard the canallers talking, and according to them the country is alive with 'cops.'"

"We're on the right lead to-night, and there's a big boodle to pull."

"Where are the traps?"

"We've dropped 'em up where they'll be handy on the outer walls."

"What time do you make the assault?"

"We've set the alarm for two o'clock."

"And it's now—?"

"About nine."

"Where will we put in the time?"

"We were going down to Huckley's."

There were three in the party, including the man who had come up from the village.

Tom Hawk was in luck; after weeks of patient toil and watching he had "piped" down to a raid. The Castle he knew to be a mansion situated in an isolated, but beautiful, part of the country, and the garrison he understood to be the master of the house, and a young gentleman visitor.

Indeed, he had all the "points" down fine, as they say in police circles, and his course for the night was well mapped out. Tom had no need to follow the men. He knew where he and the three would meet again, and as the men strolled down to Huckley's, our hero returned to where he had left his good horse Badger.

Half an hour subsequent to the incidents we have described, a horseman rode up to the grand entrance of a fine country mansion, and dismounting turned his horse loose, and ascending the stoop, rang the bell.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening, and lights were still dimly burning in the parlor, while a bright light gleamed from the windows of the library.

The detective was compelled to ring a second time before there came a response to his summons; and then there came an inquiry from behind the closed door.

"Who is there?"

"A gentleman who would speak with Mr. Pladwell on important business."

"It is a late hour to come to a gentleman's house."

"Open the door, sir; my business is imperative."

The bolts in the door were pulled back, the door opened and the master of the mansion, an elderly and pleasant-faced gentleman, stood in the opening. He fixed his eyes on the late visitor keenly.

Tom Hawk said:

"Sir, you may be surprised to see me at such an hour, but I will ask you to preserve your nerve and look here."

As the detective spoke he lowered the lapel of his coat and disclosed his badge.

"An officer!" ejaculated the owner of the mansion.

"Hist!" warned the detective; "not so loud, sir; even the trees may hear a warning!"

"Will you come in, sir?"

"Yes, if you please."

The master of the mansion led the detective to his library, and, when both were seated, asked:

"What is the purport of your visit?"

"I believe, sir, you are one of the subscribers to the fund for ridding the country hereabouts of a gang of burglars who are working their racket in this district?"

In a hesitating tone the gentleman said:

"Yes; I am a contributor."

"You have heard of me then, sir; my name is Hawk—Tom Hawk."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of you, Mr. Hawk."

"Then I have your confidence, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Your house has been selected to be worked to-night. I got wind of the excursion, and that is why I am here."

The master of the house turned pale as he repeated:

"My house is to be worked to-night?"

"Yes, sir; they will be on hand about two or three o'clock, and I propose to make a gobble to-night."

"This is startling news, sir!"

"Yes; but it's lucky I got down on their trail!" and as the detective spoke he picked up a photograph-album from the table and ran his eye over several pictures; suddenly his attention was arrested by the photograph of a young man; his face turned pale, but he uttered no exclamation, while there was a depth of significance in his voice as he asked:

"Ah, whose picture is that, sir?"

CHAPTER III.

THE master of the mansion glanced at the picture and answered, readily:

"Oh, that is a photograph of my son!"

"Your son!" repeated the detective in a startled tone.

"Yes, sir."

A moment Tom Hawk was silent, and strange thoughts ran through his mind as he mentally muttered, "Here is a gol here is the groundwork of a fearful life-drama; it is evident that good, honest-faced old man has no suspicion of the terrible truth!"

Such were the mental mutterings of the detective, while audibly he asked:

"Where is your son?"

"He is absent from home."

"How long since you saw him?"

"I have not seen him for several weeks."

"Where is he?"

The master of the house did not answer, and the eyes of the two men met. The orbs of one glowed with eager interest, while the other's shone with a gleam of surprise.

"Why are you so interested in the whereabouts of my son?"

The detective realized that he was a little too previous, and he said, in an off-hand tone:

"Oh, I merely felt an interest in knowing. I think I met the young man once."

"Ah, indeed! Where?"

"At a photographer's."

"Very likely; but now, sir, let us know what we are to do about this contemplated robbery of my house that you report."

"I learned of the robbery at a late moment, but in time to save you from loss; and I hope to capture the burglars."

"Would it not be better, sir, to warn them off?"

"To warn them off would be to let them escape."

"Yes, yes, I know."

The detective fixed his eyes upon the master of the house, and asked, in a significant and pointed tone and manner:

"Is there any reason why you should desire that the robbers should escape? Remember, we may never have a better opportunity for capturing them."

The master of the house looked the detective straight in the face, and answered:

"Certainly, I wish them captured. I do not understand your remark."

"You suggested warning them off."

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I do not wish bloodshed in my house, if I can avoid it. I would like to avoid the notoriety which would attend an attempt to rob my house."

"And you have no other reason for desiring that the men should be warned off?"

"Your questions are very strange; what reasons could I have?"

The master of the house spoke in a straightforward, honest manner, and his eyes met the keen, fixed glance of the detective's.

A moment's silence followed, when the detective said:

"If you desire it, sir, the robbers can and shall be warned off; but it is a pity to let them escape."

"Can you not arrest them?"

"What advantage would there be in arresting them? We would only be compelled to let them go again. Men are not convicted on mere suspicion. To rid this district of these men, to make a residence here safe, the men must not only be arrested, but convicted; and to convict them I must catch them when actually engaged in an attempt at burglary."

"Ah, I see, and I will not stand in your way. As my house is their objective point, I must make a sacrifice in the interests of justice. I hope you have sufficient force to accomplish the arrest?"

"I have all the force necessary at my command."

"And now what do you propose?"

"Your family must retire at the usual time; your house must be closed as though you did not expect a robbery; all lights must be extinguished, and the rest left to me."

"And what must I do, sir?"

"Retire to your room and go to sleep."

"Do you think I can retire to my room and go to sleep, knowing that an attempt to rob my house is to be made?"

"You know I am here."

A suspicion appeared to suddenly cross the mind of the master of the house, and he said:

"I have no real proof, sir, that you're the party you represent yourself to be."

"I can furnish you proof, sir; look at this!"

The detective handed over a sheet of paper on which was written the names of all the gentlemen who had subscribed to the fund for the maintenance of a special detective.

"That is sufficient, sir, but it will be impossible for me to sleep."

"It is necessary that you should retire to your room; and, sir, one word more; unless I summon you, do not leave your room, even though the robbers may come and a fight shall take place."

"I certainly shall not remain in my room!"

"Please remain until I summon you; there may be danger should you come forth before."

"I will not promise."

"At what time do you usually retire, sir?"

"It is about my time now."

"Will you please go?"

"Your request is very strange."

"No, sir; I do not wish the robbers to get a 'tip' on me. They know the habits of your family. At any moment their watch may commence, and should they find anything out of the way their suspicions will be aroused and the game may be postponed. I have worked hard to get them down to this point, and I should like to capture them to-night. I want a sure go this time."

Reluctantly the master of the house retired to his room, and the detective, a few moments later, set about making his arrangements for the exciting duties of the night.

Detectives are inured to peril, and well-trained officers are cool and steady, but nevertheless they always fully appreciate their danger.

Burglars are the most dangerous class of men with whom they are brought in contact, as housebreakers, as a rule, are desperate men, and as capture means a long term of imprisonment, the villains are always ready, in an emergency, to sacrifice life in order to avoid capture.

Our hero had reason to know that the particular gang with whom he was to deal that night were among the most desperate of their class, and he knew also that they would be well-armed and prepared to fight.

Tom Hawk went outside and led his horse to a certain point, and then after a careful survey passed into the house.

All the lights were extinguished, and the detective took up his quarters in the library. All was still, and he sat alone, and his thoughts ran over the events of the day.

He had fallen upon singular and startling dramatic incidents. The finding of the girl by the road-side, and her strange reticence, was a singular episode; and yet the girl was innocent-looking, very beautiful, and evidently refined, and she had entered a handsome house.

The second incident was the discovery of a certain photograph in the family album of the house he had set to protect against a midnight robbery.

An hour passed. The detective glanced at his watch, and muttered:

"It's two hours yet before I may expect them."

CHAPTER IV.

EVERY one knows how slowly time appears to pass when one is waiting and watching, and to the detective minutes seemed doubled in their length.

He had removed his boots and had put on a pair of moccasins; and, to pass the time, he determined to look around a bit, and get the exact lay of the house. He passed from the library across the broad hall that ran through the center of the house, and entered the parlor situated on the opposite side. Once in the large room he drew his masked lantern, and let the sharp glare of light flash around.

The house was evidently the abode of wealth, and works of art of rare value were observable on every hand; and, as the light was passed from object to object, the detective, in muttered tones, made his comments. At length the ray fell upon a portrait on the wall, and, as Tom Hawk's eyes fell upon the pictured face, he gave a start.

"By George!" he muttered, "this is terrible! there is that face again; there will be sad work in this house to-night." A moment the detective hesitated, but at length added, "I must do my duty; he is one of the most desperate men in the country, but it is strange, alas! it is strange!"

The officer stood before the portrait examining the outlines of the face, when he heard a noise, and quick as a flash, indeed, he "doused his glim," and stood on the alert. He knew it was not quite twelve o'clock, and he knew also that house-breakers, as a rule, for reasons, were faithful to their set time.

A moment passed and our hero became con-

scious that there was some one in the room besides himself. It might be the master of the house, and Tom was determined that the man should first declare his presence.

A moment passed and a terrible silence prevailed; the intruder into the room did not speak or declare himself, but Tom determined to lay low; soon he became aware that some one was approaching him through the darkness, and he was amazed at the lightness and stealthiness of the step.

"Can it be possible," he mentally exclaimed, "that the scoundrels are already in the house?" and as he spoke he let his hand rest upon the butt of his locust, and the next instant he was compelled to step aside as the mysterious intruder to the room passed within a foot of him.

The detective thought it time to act, but some accident might occur in the darkness, and he suddenly flashed his light, and a low cry of utter and unrestrained amazement fell from his lips; the flash of light revealed not a man nor a robber, but a woman—a beautiful young girl—and, oh, horror! in the brief moment that the light flashed, our hero recognized the beautiful face of the girl whom he had found fainting beside the road at an earlier hour in the evening.

As the light flashed the girl also uttered a low, startled cry, and then again all was still and dark, for the detective had merely flashed his light like a coast signal to let the gloom follow.

Strange and thrilling were the emotions of the detective as he stood and pondered over his discovery; but a moment later he was recalled to a more active source of amazement.

The girl came toward him with extended arms as though feeling her way in the darkness, and the detective did not move, but let her delicate fingers rest upon his broad bosom.

"Hist!" she said, in a whisper, "fly, leave this house at once! Your plans are known; you will be captured!"

It was with a cold chill tugging at his heart that the detective realized that the lovely girl was an accomplice of the gang of burglars.

He was a cool man. He did not give himself away. He was on the lay for information, and in a whisper he answered:

"Lay low; it's all right. I know the game."

"No, no; listen; for Heaven's sake flee this house."

"Who warns me?"

"Never mind who warns you; plans have been laid for your capture. Flee! flee! remember where you are!"

"Tell me who warns me?"

"No, no; you are warned. Go! go!"

There came a noise, when the girl sprang suddenly away.

The detective stood and listened, but the sound evidently was only one of those unaccountable midnight creaks that oftentimes affright the timid in the small still hours.

A moment the detective waited and then again he flashed his light around. The beautiful girl had disappeared. Like an apparition she had come, like an apparition she had gone.

Our hero searched around in every direction; but the fair midnight intruder was nowhere to be seen.

"Well, well," muttered the officer, "this beats me; beats anything I ever struck. She is a lovely girl, and has an innocent face. I have often met beautiful female criminals, but never one with a face so gentle and innocent-looking."

Tom passed from the parlor and looked around in every direction; but could discover no signs of the strange visitant to the parlor.

"Well, well," he muttered, "I'll get at the bottom of this mystery, and already I have an inkling of the truth—the terrible truth!"

After a search through the lower part of the house the detective re-entered the library, and had just seated himself when the door opened and a figure in white entered the room.

"Who is here?" came the inquiry, in a male voice.

Our hero recognized the voice of the master of the house.

"I am here, sir."

"Have you seen anything?"

"You are disobeying orders, sir."

"I can not sleep, I can not rest, and I thought while listening I heard an outcry."

"Are all the members of your family resting quietly?"

"Yes."

"None of them have been walking in the street?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I will tell you some other time."

"What has happened, sir?"

"I can not tell you."

"Do you think the burglars will come here?"

"I have every reason to expect that they will be here unless they are given the 'tip' from this house."

"Who could have given them the 'tip' from here? None of my family know of the proposed attack."

"You are sure of that?"

"I am."

"Very well, sir, go to your room, and I beseech you do not leave it again until you receive a summons from me."

"This suspense is terrible."

"Never mind, sir, we have not long to wait now."

The master of the house retired from the room.

The detective sat long, silently waiting the approach of the burglars, although he had some misgivings as to their appearance. He feared they might receive the tip from a quarter of which he knew.

At length it approached two o'clock; the detective sat in the dark room, when suddenly there shot across it a ray of light, and in an undertone he muttered:

"Here they are!"

CHAPTER V.

THE detective had been on the watch. He knew the time, but he had lost all expectation of their appearance, and when they came it was after all a little of a surprise.

The beautiful apparition had failed to notify the villains; more probably the desperate men, after having been warned, had persisted in their purpose.

A low French window opened out from the library upon the veranda, and the flash of light came from the outside, as one of the robbers placed his masked lantern against the window-pane.

Our hero was prepared for some such operation, and as the burglar pressed his nose against the glass and glanced into the room, he saw not the cool-headed, iron-nerved man who was there in waiting to do his duty at the proper moment.

The lantern was only pressed against the window for one moment, when it was withdrawn, and the room was once more veiled in darkness.

"Now is my time!" muttered the detective; and he passed from the room, closing the door behind him, and took up a position at the key-hole.

Tom Hawk was not at all excited, although he anticipated being speedily engaged in a terrible combat.

He was calculating every chance. He wished the men to break in. He did not wish to nab them, and only be prepared to make the lesser charge of an attempt at burglary; it was his scheme to let them break in—to be actually engaged in one of the gravest crimes known to the law.

The men had come well prepared for their job, and it took them but a few moments to open the window, and two of them stepped into the room.

Both men wore slouched hats and half-face drop-masks; but the detective was able to recognize them respectively, and he muttered:

"He's there!"

One man had been left outside on the watch, while the two others entered.

The men were very deliberate in their movements, showing that they were no novices at the business, but old experienced cracksmen, who were cool enough to take all the chances.

The detective saw them glance around through the eye-holes of their masks, and then he saw them approach each other and hold a whispered conversation.

Tom Hawk still lay low. He had a plan of operations all laid out; a capture was what he desired, and he was waiting for the men to separate, so that he might "close in" on them in detail, and thus avoid a fight and danger if possible.

The scoundrels only held a few moments' consultation, when they made for the door, through the key-hole of which our hero was watching them. He retreated across the hall and took up a position in the parlor, when he became aware of the presence of some one near him. He at once concluded that the fair apparition had reappeared, and he stole over to where he saw the outlines of a form, and said:

"Hark! you give one word of warning and I will down you!"

"It's I!" came the answer.

"Mr. Pladwell?"

"Yes."

"Sir, why did you not obey me?"

"I could not sleep, and I came down to watch. I am an old soldier; I can aid you."

"As you are so determined, sir, I will not object that you should aid me. Keep your position here, and, if you get a chance, seize one of the fellows, and at the same time give an alarm; but if you are injured, remember, I warned you to leave the whole business to me."

"You need not fear. You underrate my skill, strength, and coolness. Now that the men are in my house I am determined to capture them."

The conversation above recorded passed quickly, and the detective returned to the door of the room and arrived just in time to see one of the men flash his lantern and steal along the hall.

Tom Hawk stole out and followed his man, and tracked him up the stairs to the upper hall. The burglar came to a halt at the head of the stairs, and slid the mask of his lantern, and his position was revealed plainly to our hero in all later movements.

"I've got this fellow, sure," muttered the detective as with noiseless tread he darted forward just as the burglar entered one of the bedrooms.

The detective took up his position outside the door, and fully five minutes passed, when the burglar stepped into the hall with a gold watch and chain in one hand and his lantern in the other.

The supreme moment of the adventure had arrived. Tom Hawk sprang forward and closed in on the man, and at the same moment clapped the darbies on his wrists.

The scoundrel stood aghast as the detective tore off hat and mask attached and revealed the fellow's face, while at the same instant he said: "I've got you all nice and handy, my dear!"

It was too late for the burglar to offer resistance. He was fairly caught, and he moved his lips to utter a warning cry to his companion, when the detective shoved a club against his cheek, and said:

"Utter one syllable and you will catch it!"

The robber was silent. He would have liked to give an alarm, but he was not prepared to die, and he was an old enough bird to understand that his captor was a man of his word.

The detective moved, with his prisoner, toward the stairs, intending to take him down and place him in charge of the master of the house, when a thrilling incident occurred.

A cry of agony rang through the house, followed by a loud report, and then there came a shrill wild scream, a heavy fall, and all was still.

The detective caught hold of his prisoner and actually dragged him down the stairs like a sack of salt, and upon reaching the bottom of the stairs he swiftly tied the man's feet and rushed toward the library. Meantime a scene of terrible confusion ensued; the cry and the report had aroused the household; servants ran screaming from their rooms, and the members of the family also came forth pale with affright; lights were lit, and the young man who was a visitor at the house came rushing down the stairway, with a light in one hand and a pistol in the other. He proved to be a plucky lad, and as he rushed into the library he covered the detective with his weapon.

"Hold, young man! Don't shoot! I'm an officer! Come here with your light."

The youth was a marvel in his way—not so excited as to be beside himself, and he took in a part of the situation and obeyed the officer's command.

Mr. Pladwell lay upon the floor, bleeding from a wound in the head, but he was not unconscious, and, when raised to his feet, muttered:

"Thank God he's not away! Oh, heavens, what a horror!"

CHAPTER VI.

The young guest advanced and demanded:

"Who shot you, sir?"

It at once became evident to the detective that the master of the mansion had spoken unguardedly, for he answered:

"I am not shot; no one shot me."

"We heard a shot, sir; and you are certainly wounded!"

"Am I?"

"Yes, sir. You have a wound here."

"Well, well; I must have wounded myself. I thought I saw a robber in the house. How awkward I must have been!"

As Mr. Pladwell spoke he caught the glance of the keen, sad eyes of the detective fixed upon him, and he answered the glance with an appealing look, which the detective well understood.

"Your house was entered, sir," said the detective, "and I have captured one of the villains."

"Let the poor devil go!" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"Let me see, sir, how badly you are wounded."

The detective placed his hand upon the wound. At that moment a young lady rushed into the room, and to her frantic appeals the detective was able truthfully to say:

"It is but a slight wound—a mere skin cut; but it was a narrow escape."

"Who did it, papa, dear? Who did it?" she demanded.

"I think I did it myself, my dear," said the father. "Yes, yes, I did it myself," and as he spoke he again looked appealingly at the detective.

The latter reached over, pretending to be examining the wound, and whispered:

"You need not fear, sir; your secret is safe with me. But let me answer all questions, and you agree to what I say; I am cooler, and know what to say. You may say something you will be compelled to retract."

"Oh, sir!" moaned the old man.

"Hush!" said the detective; and, turning to the daughter, he said: "You must not question your father now; he is very much excited, and really does not know what he is saying. He has not recovered from the shock."

The daughter, who was a handsome girl, proved also to be a woman of nerve, and, when she learned that her father was not seriously hurt, became quite calm.

"Who are you, sir, and how is it you are here?"

"I am a detective, miss, whom your father and some other gentlemen engaged to break up the gang of burglars who have infested this district. I learned that a raid was to be made on this house, and I was on hand to foil their attempt and arrest them."

"Did my father know of your presence in the house?"

"Yes."

"And why did you permit him to run the chance of getting killed?"

"The risk is the result of your father's own obstinacy. I tried to persuade him to remain in his own room and leave the affair to me, but he would not. He came down to take a hand in, contrary to my orders."

"And did you see one of the robbers, papa?" asked the daughter.

"See him, my child? ah, Kate, Kate!"

"Hush, sir, you are excited; you must not talk; it's all right now, the burglars are out of the house," and again turning to the daughter the detective said:

"You must not question your papa now. Do you not see he is suffering from the sudden shock and is not responsible for what he says? Return to your room; all danger is past now."

"But I can not leave papa."

"Yes, yes, Kate; go to your room. I am all right. I feel better now. Did you say, sir, you had captured one of the scoundrels?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"In the hall safe and sound, and if your daughter will retire to bed again we can question the fellow I captured."

As the detective spoke he passed a meaning glance to the master of the house.

"Go to bed, Kate, dear; it is necessary."

"Why, papa, I can not sleep."

"Well, you must retire to your room. I insist upon it, and you, Mr. Gains, I am much obliged to you for your gallant run to the rescue, but we will excuse you. Please lead my daughter, your cousin, to the door of her room, and then leave me alone with the officer."

"Can I not do anything for you, papa?"

"No, no, child; no, no, my hurt is a mere trifle."

"You need not fear for your father, my dear young lady. I assure you the wound does not amount to anything; and now as I must be away from here, and wish to have a few moments' talk with your father on private busi-

ness, I hope you will obey his command."

And to the young man the detective said:

"Please see the young lady to her room, and then come down-stairs."

Seeing that he was to be permitted to return down-stairs, the young man urged his fair cousin to leave the room, and she at length permitted herself to be led away.

The moment they were gone, the master of the house demanded, in a hollow voice:

"Do you know the truth, sir?"

"Hush! we will talk the matter over presently. I have captured one of the robbers."

"Oh, let him go."

"No, no, it is not necessary, at least not until we find out how much he knows."

"Ah, I see."

At this moment the young man returned, and the detective said:

"My young friend, I am going to get you to act as guard for me for a few moments."

"I am at your service."

"Yes, yes; come this way, please."

The detective led the way out into the hall, and, seizing hold of the bound robber, dragged him into the parlor and said:

"You stand guard over him; do not leave him, and if he attempts to move give the alarm!"

"What is your object, sir?" asked the man.

"I may use him as a bait, a decoy," said the detective in a suggestive tone.

"I do not understand?"

"I will explain. His companions may come back to rescue him, and we will capture the balance of them."

"Ah, I see now."

The young man began to realize that after all the watching of the bound man was a post of danger and trust, and he was satisfied.

"I can depend upon you?"

"Certainly."

"You will give an immediate alarm?"

"I will, sir!"

"All right, keep your eye peeled and do not let the fellow talk to you, nor leave him an instant on any pretext whatever."

"You may depend upon me."

The detective returned to the library and found the master of the house sitting there, pale, and with a look of horror upon his face fearful to behold.

"Now, sir, what have you to tell me?"

"Nothing!" came the answer.

"Yes, sir, you must tell me all you saw in this room."

CHAPTER VII.

"Sir, I do not know what facts you may possess, but I know all you suspect; consider my terrible position, and permit me to keep my lips sealed."

"No, sir; you must speak! Your own happiness demands that you should speak!"

"I can not speak, and had that bullet come from any other hand, I would now pray that it had entered my brain."

"Listen, sir; all may not be as hopeless as you believe."

"What do you mean, sir? No, no! speak not to me, now! Reform, eh? is that what you mean? No, no! Neither reform nor death even can ever wipe from my heart the horror that has been imprinted there this night!"

"But, sir, you do not take what I mean?"

"What do you mean? What can you mean?"

"I will speak; there may be some terrible mistake there."

"Some mistake?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"It may not be!"

"Sir! I saw with my own eyes! the mask was removed! Yes, yes; the murderous shot which was fired at me came from the hand of— The old gentleman's voice was choked, and tears rained down his face.

"Sir, it is possible that you have been deceived in spite of the evidence of your own eyes."

"Impossible!"

"No, no; you are not aware of the strange experiences that have come under my observation. I tell you plainly I have good grounds, strange and wonderful as it may seem, to believe that there is some fatal mistake in this matter!"

"It can not be."

"I can not aid you in arriving at the truth unless you confide in me and give me a frank

and unreserved series of answers to all my questions."

"Do you know what I suspect?"

"Yes."

"Name my suspicion."

"You believe you recognized in one of the robbers your own son?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, to my sorrow, I did! There can be no mistake. It was my poor Charlie—the boy whom I once loved as the apple of my eye."

"And you are sure you recognized him?"

"I am," came the answer in a tone of agony.

"I think it is a terrible mistake."

"You are a good man, and you would seek to console me; but, sir, it is the fatal—the damning truth—I received this wound at the hand of my own son."

"One question, sir. Until to night had you any reason to suspect that your son was a villain?"

"Never, sir. He had always given evidence of being one of the noblest boys who ever lived! And he was until he fell into the hands of a siren; but I never believed that a Circe from the very realms of the archfiend could convert my son into a common burglar."

"And how long since your son has been under the influence of this siren?"

"Less than one year."

"You are sure of this latter fact?"

"I am sure, certainly."

"Then, sir, I affirm that there is a positive chance that there is some fatal mistake."

"There can not be. No, no, I saw his face!"

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, no; but I saw his face."

"Listen to me, sir; I am a man who has had a great deal of experience, and a strange and weird impression has taken possession of my mind. I will not tell you now whence the impression arises; but I honestly believe, despite the evidence of your own eyes, that there is a terrible mistake here, and your son is still an honorable young man."

"It can not be. Were the evidence of my eyes denied and proved false, there remains one confirming fact."

"And what is the confirming fact?"

"The siren was here, aiding and abetting him."

"Ah, it is as I thought!" ejaculated the detective.

"Sir, do you know the siren?"

"I will not speak of that now; but I propose to have a talk with my prisoner in your presence. Mark well all that is said; but under no circumstances say one word yourself. Can I rely upon you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Pladwell, you have my full sympathy. I am with you heart and soul in this matter, and I assure you I have good grounds for believing that, despite all that has occurred to-night, you are laboring under a fatal mistake."

"You think it possible that I would fail to recognize my own son?"

"I have reason to believe that in this instance you have mistaken another man for your son."

"Would that I could share your belief! but it is impossible. Strange and terrible as is the fact, there is no mistake—my poor boy has been misled into the life of a villain, and has sought to make a victim of his own father! Horror! horror!"

"We shall see, sir. I am not a man to go so far astray in such an important matter; but remember you leave the burglar to me, and under no circumstances say one word, or you may give a villain a cue."

"I will attend your words."

The detective went into the parlor and ordered the captured thief to be brought into the library. The fellow, when his limbs were released, followed in dogged silence. Once in the library, the detective seated the robber in a chair, and said:

"Now, my man, I am going to ask you a few questions, and I want direct answers, as I am able to answer all my own questions; but I want a little corroboration from you in the presence of this gentleman."

"I've got nothing to say; you've 'nibbed' me and that's my luck!" answered the captured robber in a surly tone.

"So you refuse to answer my questions?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well, it will go all the harder with you when you come before his honor."

"I ain't givin' nothin' away, I ain't."

"Oh, yes, you are."

"No, sir."

"Don't you want to get out of this scrape?"

The robber laughed and answered:

"Ah, I know you fellows; you can't come that over me!"

"But don't you know a little secret that might induce us to let up on you?"

"I wish I did."

"Just think, now."

"I ain't much of a thinker; I ain't had enough schoolin'."

"How many were in the racket to-night?"

"I reckon you know that or you wouldn't have been here to-night."

"How many are in the gang outside of the two chaps who were with you?"

"I ain't givin' nothin' away."

"Snagsy was with you to-night?"

"I didn't say so."

"And Billy Pell was with you?"

"I ain't givin' nothin' away."

"Answer one question: How long have you known Billy Pell?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE man answered once more:

"I ain't givin' nothin' away."

"He's an old pal of yours, isn't he?"

The thief remained silent.

"You've known him a good many years?"

Still the burglar maintained silence.

"Hear me, Bradley. If Pell is a new pal, there's a chance for you."

"Is there?"

"Yes."

"What's my chance?"

"Well, come, now, my man, speak out."

"I've nothing to give."

"Who suggested working this house?"

"Do you want me to speak before I'm in the box? No, no; you can't make me open up. I'm too old a bird, and you know it."

"All right, old man; you may never know the chance you've had for getting out of this scrape."

"By turning state's evidence, eh, when I'm no squealer? No, no; I'll take my dose like a little man, and wish the lads better luck; and you'll never get a word out of me!"

"Take him away, Mr. Gains; take him into the other room," said the officer. "And here, take this; if he attempts to cut up an didos, just give him a rap or two, and call me."

The detective handed the young man his locust.

When the robber was led from the room, the detective said:

"What do you think now, sir?"

"Oh, do not ask me what horror to think that the wretch who was here is the companion of my son."

"Listen, Mr. Pladwell, I am more and more convinced that there is a terrible mistake in this matter. I will admit that since being in your house I have recalled certain incidents which I have heard which lead me to believe that my conclusions are correct. Now, answer me, you have had a misunderstanding with your son?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you think he may have become a villain?"

"Did I not see him this night with my own eyes?"

"If it was your son whom you saw to-night that fellow who has just left this room does not know it."

"He will not admit it."

"Bah! you are not as well acquainted with the characteristics of thieves as I am or you would know that the fellow would have taken my hint and have let out the fact in a jiffy."

"Then you think my son has not disclosed his identity?"

"If your son is a thief one thing is certain; that man Bradley does not know him as your son. I'd bet a thousand on that against a ten-dollar note."

"It may be possible that my son did not know that it was my house they intended to rob until he reached here."

"It is more probable that your son knows nothing about the robbery."

The father remained silent.

"Now, sir, tell me all the circumstances that led up to the disagreement between yourself and your son."

"Do not ask me to go over the sad details. Have I not been punished for my severity?"

"Tell me all the facts, sir."

"No, no! Oh, would I had known what you suspected when you first asked me about

that photograph, and this thing would never have occurred; now that I remember, you are a cruel man in your zeal to have let this thing proceed so far."

"What should I have done?"

"Warned them off before they entered the house."

"Listen, sir; had I been sure that one of the robbers was your son I would have done so, but I swear I am fully convinced that the man Pell is not your son, despite the fatal resemblance."

"The what, sir?" ejaculated the father.

"The fatal resemblance."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have reason to believe that there lives a villain who bears a fatal resemblance to your son."

"What grounds have you for this strange declaration?"

"Tell me all the facts concerning your quarrel with your son, and I will tell you all I know and all I believe."

"You shall hear the story."

"Yes, sir; proceed."

"My son was a noble boy until about a year ago, when a young lady came to live with a neighbor of mine as governess to his children. She is a handsome girl, and met my boy and fell in love with him, and at once set to work with all her siren arts to win his love, and failing in the conventional manner, she managed one day, at an opportune moment, to fall from a boat into the river. My son rescued her, and from that moment the mischief was done. She forged her siren chain around him, and he promised to become her husband."

"And you opposed the match?"

"Certainly I did. I knew her to be a bad woman."

"Who told you so?"

"I knew it."

"Who told you she was a bad woman?"

"One who knew her well."

"Had you no other proof?"

"Not until to-night."

"Well, what proofs did you secure to-night?"

"She was in Charlie's company in his attempt to rob this house; it was her hand that guided his aim when he fired at me."

The detective was an interested listener.

"So you think it was her arm that guided the weapon?"

"Yes, sir; I saw her do it."

"She guided his arm to save your life."

The father gazed aghast.

"Sir!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, I mean what I say, and, in good time, I will prove that the 'siren,' as you call her, saved your life."

"Had the weapon been in her hand alone, I would that the shot had been fatal!"

"The day will come when you will feel differently; but we will continue the narrative: The young man you saw did not believe the young lady to be a siren?"

"No; he believed her to be all that is pure and innocent, and there is where she obtained her power over him."

"And he sought to marry her?"

"Yes."

"He came to you for your consent?"

"Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him if he married the girl he should never enter my house again."

"And what did he say?"

"He was 'cool as a cucumber'—Charlie always was cool—and he said:

"Father, I shall marry Emily North with or without your consent; and, as that means practically an accomplished fact, I shall leave your house never to enter it again, except upon your invitation. I will go and earn a fortune, and then come back and marry Emily."

"How long ago did this occur?"

"Three months."

"And in three months do you think that that noble young man has become an accomplished burglar?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE father gazed at the detective in speechless amazement.

"Come, my good sir, answer me—do you believe that in three months a noble, generous, and brave young man could become an accomplished burglar?"

"But, sir, did I not recognize my own flesh and blood when the mask was raised? Yes, yes, it was my son, I know it!"

"And I know better."
"Then you must have some grounds for your declaration."

"All the grounds I have are the facts that are known to you. I know it is impossible that a noble youth could be transformed into a burglar and assassin in three short months; this is a strange world, and wonderful incidents are of daily occurrence, and this is certainly one of the strangest experiences of my life; but I am now fully satisfied that there is some terrible mistake somewhere, and the robber Pell and your son Charles Pladwell are two different individuals."

"Bless you, sir, for those words! but I have no reason to believe you are right; there are certain facts known to me which prepare me to believe that indeed within three months my son has been transformed by the siren into a bad, wicked man!"

"My dear sir, I do not believe the young girl to whom you allude is a bad girl. I believe her to be a sweet, brave young creature. I am satisfied that you are prejudiced against her."

"Why should I be prejudiced against her?"

"Because she is only a governess."

"You do not know me, sir! Were she a worthy person, I care not how humble her position, I should not have opposed the wedding."

"Let me ask you one question: What object would even a siren have in converting the son of a millionaire into a common assassin? would it not be more siren-like if she were to seek to reconcile him to his father?"

"Oh, sir, listen: I am a man of business; my heart pleads for me to accept your theory. I love my son; he is my only boy. He was to have been my heir and successor in business, but I can not blind the positive evidence of my own senses. I can not go contrary to my own good judgment. I can not deceive myself in order to gain a few moments' unsatisfactory peace of mind. I have but one hope now."

"And what is your hope?"

"That the whole affair was merely a masquerade on the part of my son, intended to lower my pride and change my will and temper toward him."

"Did you ever observe any characteristic of your son that would suggest him capable of such a ghastly masquerade?"

"No, sir."

"Does that wound upon your forehead suggest a masquerade?"

"No, sir."

"Then you may dismiss that hope."

"Ah, but it was the siren who urged him on; it was her hand that guided his aim."

"I know better, sir."

"Do you know the young lady?"

"I have seen her."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Where?"

"In this house."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"What mystery is this?"

"There is no mystery; you saw her yourself."

"Yes; but why did you not report her presence?"

"I knew she was on an errand of mercy."

"An errand of mercy?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"She was here to perform a duty that I could not undertake; to avert a catastrophe which it did not become me to do."

"Will you explain?"

"I will explain my theory."

"Please."

"The girl knew that the robbery was planned."

"Ah, how would she know?"

"That is a mystery I can not explain."

"She got the information from my son, and that fact confirms all the fearful suspicion."

"It matters not how she secured her information, one fact is certain: she sought to prevent the robbery."

"How do you know?"

"I will explain; she came to this house two hours ago."

"How did she gain admission?"

"That I can not tell you; but she accidentally ran across me in the parlor, and in the darkness she mistook me for one of the robbers and she warned me to leave this house, to flee away, warned me that their plans were known."

"And why did you not arrest her?"

"Simply because in your interest I was will-

ing that she should warn them off, although as an officer I did not dare do so myself."

"And you believe she really sought to prevent the robbery?"

"Yes."

"Then you admit she knew of it in advance?"

"Yes."

"How do you explain her knowledge?"

"That is a mystery that remains to be explained, but I have my own theory. Of one thing I am certain—Emily North is not in sympathy and accord with the robbers, even though one of them may be your son."

"Mr. Hawk, I am a wretched man; I have no desire to live. I can not face the disgrace and infamy that have come upon me."

"Mr. Pladwell, listen to me. On my honor I assure you that I do not believe in the guilt of your son."

"How do you explain the fact of his being in this house, under a mask, in company with a burglar? How do you explain this wound, when I saw with my own eyes my son, and no one else, hold the weapon from which the bullet came?"

"Have you ever been abroad?"

"Yes."

"Have you any recollections that would make it possible that you had another son?"

"No, sir."

The answer came in a most decided tone.

"Have you any nephews?"

"No, sir; I see what you are trying to establish."

"What, sir?"

"A resemblance; but you can not succeed. I had one brother. He died in Paris when he was but a mere youth, unmarried. I never had a sister, and I have no cousins or relations sufficiently near to account for a resemblance so perfect and striking as to even momentarily deceive a father."

"This is all very strange, sir, and yet to me it appears even more strange that the son you describe could become a robber. Have you ever heard from your son since he left your house?"

"Yes."

"In person, or by letter?"

"I received a letter from him."

"And what was the purport of the letter?"

"He said he was going to South America."

"Did he name a date when he was to sail?"

"No."

"Did he name the city he intended to visit?"

"No; he merely wrote and told me he was going away."

"Did he write to Miss North?"

"I do not know."

"That is all the word you received from him?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I have one thing to say—"

All further talk was cut off by the report of a pistol in the parlor.

CHAPTER X.

TOM HAWK sprung away like a flash, and ran across the hall to the parlor. He was just in time. Two men had gained access to the room. A desperate attempt was being made by the two robbers to rescue their companion. The young gentleman who had been placed as a guard had discharged his weapon as a signal at the moment an attack was made upon him.

At the instant our hero entered the room one of the masked robbers stood over the youth, while the second fellow was seeking to unclasp the darbies on his pal's wrists. As the detective dashed into the room, both burglars made a dash for him, and only discovered their mistake when one of them received a blow from a locust that sent him sprawling. The second man dashed away the instant his pal went over, and with a desperate effort rushed through the open parlor window.

Tom Hawk ran to the window, but the man had disappeared, and the detective returned to make sure of the fellow he had downed, and, as he clapped the darbies on the man, he remarked:

"Well, Cheesey, old boy, I've got you this time!"

"You'd never have got me if I'd known it was you in here doing the business."

"Yes: I was waiting for you fellows."

Mr. Gains was uninjured, and our hero saw that Snagsey was all secure when he removed both burglars to the hall.

"I do not think the fellow will come back again, Mr. Gains, but we will be on the safe side. I do not wish to put you in any peril."

"I wish I had seen the fellows before they closed in on me so suddenly."

"It's all right; you are uninjured, we've got another one of them, and we'll keep him; you watch the same man. I want to ask this chap a few questions."

The detective led Cheesey into the library and said:

"I've got another one of them, Mr. Pladwell, and we will see what this fellow has to say."

"You won't get anything out of me!" spoke up the captured burglar.

"Ah, I reckon I will when you see a chance to 'flit' on a bit of information."

"I give nothing away."

"Who planned this job?"

"You'll find that out."

"You didn't plan it!"

"Of course I didn't."

"Who did?"

"I don't know; I was only passing the house, and hearing a row, ran in to see what was going on, and got nabbed."

The fellow's face wore a knowing expression as he made the statement.

"How long have you known Pell, Cheesey?"

"Who's Pell?" demanded the burglar.

"Ah! you don't know Pell?"

"Never heard of him."

"And you've nothing to offer?"

"Yes; I've a good defense, when the time comes; but it's no use talking to you. I'm not giving anything away to you."

The detective took the robber to the hall, and, returning to the library, said:

"You see, sir, neither of those fellows know that your son is their pal."

"They do not wish to tell the truth."

"Let me tell you that, despite their seeming heroism, both of them would squeal in a minute, if there was a sure chance to save themselves. They put on this heroic air simply because they know I can not release them, unless they have a dead set on me; and, let me tell you, did they suspect their pal as your son and heir, they'd plead that in defense so quick we wouldn't have time to consider their proposition."

"Mr. Hawk, what do you propose to do?"

"I propose to investigate. I will tell you the truth, sir; I could have captured Pell, but I did not wish to do so at present. I wish to 'pipe' the man, and find out who he really is, and then you and I will consult."

"You are a kind and noble man."

"We will not talk about that; but there is one favor I will ask; you will not give the least inkling of your suspicion even to your daughter, or any other member of your family."

"I will keep silent, sir."

"In a few days I will have some important information for you; and, in the meantime, if you are called upon to testify concerning the two rascals I have caught, you will not speak of the presence of the young lady, or intimate that you recognized the third burglar. Let it appear that he did not raise his mask when he saw you."

"You can depend upon me, but, sir, I can see that a great sorrow o'er hangs me."

"Mr. Pladwell, mark my words; from this moment dismiss all suspicion from your mind that one of the burglars was your son."

"I can not do it. I appreciate the kindness of your motives, but I can not conceal from myself the truth; Charles, my son, fired at me intending to kill me. It was because of the recognition. I now believe that he sought to do so; but I can not be deceived, this blow will kill me. I shall not live to suffer under the disgrace. Your kindness gives me a respite, gives me time to pass to my grave ere the shaft falls."

"Mr. Pladwell, I swear I am not seeking to deceive you, and I swear I have good reason for believing that it is only a case of fatal resemblance. I pray you do nothing rash until you hear from me, and I promise you that even though it prove to be your son, you shall have an opportunity at least to avert the impending exposure of your sorrow and disgrace."

It was dawn when the detective spoke the words above recorded, and he requested Mr. Pladwell to retire to his room and seek more rest.

"What will you do with your prisoners?"

"With the assistance of one of your neighbors, with whom I am acquainted, I shall take them to jail."

At this instant a cry of horror rang through the house.

"That is my daughter's voice!" exclaimed Mr. Pladwell, as he rushed from the room.

Miss Pladwell had sought to descend the stairs, when she saw the two masked burglars, and it was the sight of them that caused her to utter the cry of terror.

She was speedily reassured, and the detective went forth to find the neighbor with whom he claimed an acquaintance. The latter proved to be a poor farmer who leased a farm some mile and a half from the Castle. The detective got the farmer to hitch up and return with him to Mr. Pladwell's house.

The two burglars were put in a wagon and carried to the county jail; and meantime the news of the attempted burglary and the capture of the burglars spread the country round, and a large crowd hung about the jail.

Tom Hawk meantime sought the district attorney, and held a long consultation with him, and at length returned about noon to the Castle.

He held a second consultation with Mr. Pladwell, and then mounting his good horse, Badger, rode away.

Tom Hawk knew well that he had only captured a part of the gang, that indeed the biggest part of his work was yet to be done; but in the meantime he was set to solve one little mystery, and he struck a strange "lay."

CHAPTER XI.

A DAY or two passed, and Tom Hawk during the time had been "laying in wait" for a certain development, and one clear moonlight night he struck his trail.

It was just after ten o'clock at night when he saw a young lady, hooded and veiled, leave the house into which he had seen Emily North enter on that night when he had discovered her fainting beside the road.

"Aha!" muttered the officer, "my game has started at last."

For certain reasons the writer will not particularly designate the locality where the incident we are about to relate occurred. It is sufficient to state that in the midsummer the village is a great resort for summer visitors from the city—a town situated on a high bluff overlooking one of the magnificent bays of the Hudson, and facing upon a creek that runs up through a most lovely section of country, the same creek being a great resort for sailing parties of ladies and gentlemen.

The veiled girl moved along through the village and passed to the town limits, when she branched off and turned down a lane leading to a remote part of the creek. Arrived at the water's edge she entered a boat and pulled along up the creek for about half a mile, when she ran the boat in-shore and took up a position under a big elm-tree.

It was a remote and lonely place, there being no residence within half a mile, and a spot far distant from the village, and unlikely to be visited at such an hour, except by some who, like the veiled lady, went to keep a tryst; at least our hero concluded that the latter was the motive of her errand, and later developments confirmed his suspicion.

Tom Hawk followed along the shore, watching the fair oarswoman in the boat, and was not far away when she landed and took up her position under the great tree.

Ten minutes passed when the detective heard a step, and he was compelled to dart aside and throw himself prone upon the ground to escape observation.

A young man passed near him; the latter was handsomely dressed in a light flannel summer suit, and as he passed, the detective secured a good view of his features.

The young man was certainly very handsome and stylish-looking; his face was a refined one, and, as the detective glanced, a cold chill curdled around his heart, and his lips unconsciously uttered the words:

"I fear the father is right, after all!"

The young man went direct to the great elm-tree, and, as he approached the girl, he sought to clasp her in his arms and imprint a kiss upon the lovely brow, but the detective, who had stolen forward, saw her recoil and throw up her hands in a warning manner. The young man exclaimed in a reproachful tone:

"What is the matter, Emmie? why do you wave me away from you?"

In a sad tone she answered:

"Charlie, this is our last meeting upon

earth! Mark well my words! The last link is broken that bound me to you, and after to-night you and I must be strangers to each other forever!"

"Nonsense, Emmie! What has come over you?"

"I am surprised that you ask me that question after what has occurred within the last few days!"

"My dear girl, what has occurred within the last few days that is so dreadful?"

"Charlie, need I repeat?"

"Yes; tell me all!"

"You remember that by accident I learned that you had associated yourself with evil men? You remember I met you on the Willow Road, that there I told you all I had learned! You remember how we parted, and I fell fainting to the ground, only to be found by the man who was pursuing you as a common criminal!"

"It's all a mistake, my dear girl!"

"A mistake!"

"Yes, a mistake!"

"Is it a mistake that I see you standing before me now!"

"Listen, Emmie, and I will tell you all! It is only a joke I am playing on the old man to force him to recede from the position he has taken toward you and me. You must not think for a moment that I am really a burglar!"

The detective had taken up a position whence he could overhear every word that passed, and a sad conviction was forcing itself upon his mind, when a remark made by the beautiful girl again aroused a certain bright hope in his mind.

"Charlie," said the girl, "it is strange how you have changed in three months; the tones of your voice are different; your manners are different. Did I not stand and gaze on your face I would think you were another person altogether."

"Nonsense, girl; I am only becoming more of a man, that is all; I am the same Charlie."

"You do not seem like the same brave, bright, honorable, Charles Pladwell who rescued me from the treacherous waters when I was nearly drowned."

"We will not talk about that now, Emmie. I love you and I will not give you up. I will admit that my method for bringing father round is a failure. He recognized me the other night and will never forgive me."

"Oh, Charlie, how can you recur to the terrible events of that night? Had it not been for me you would stand to-day the murderer of your own father. Horrors! what a memory! No, no, I can never forget nor forgive! To-night is our last meeting! My life is blasted, and I pray you go away to some foreign land and reform; but you must never seek to see me again!"

"Nonsense, Emmie, I can not, I will not give you up; this night you must fly with me!"

"Charlie, what are you saying?"

"I am saying just what I mean; I'll wait no longer. You must, you shall be my wife this very night! I have all the arrangements made to take you to New York. Once my wife, and I set out to become a better man, to become the Charlie I was when I snatched you from the river!"

"Oh, Charlie! what is your purpose?"

"I propose that you shall save me against myself."

"And become the wife of the man who, but for my intervening hand, would have become the murderer of his own father?"

"No, no! I would not have shot him; the discharge of the pistol was an accident; but tell me, Emmie, how was it that you were present there?"

"I will tell you. I suspected that your father's house was to become the object of attack, and I went there intending to warn you at the last moment to refrain from so horrible a deed. While in the house I ran across the man who was there to thwart your scheme, and in the darkness I mistook him for one of your companions. I warned him, thinking it was your friend, that the intended robbery was discovered, and at the last moment learned my mistake, when I sped away and concealed myself, still determined to warn you. I walked around the house, and had about concluded you were not coming that night, when I discovered that you had entered the house. It was too late to warn you, but I was determined to save you even at the last moment, if possible, and I ran into the library just at the instant

your father made the terrible discovery that the burglar was his own son! What occurred after, Charlie, you know, and I wish I had died ere the knowledge came to me!"

CHAPTER XII.

"EMMIE, you say a change has come over me, but I can say it is you over whom the change has come; you are growing so particular and scrupulous!"

"There is no change in me, Charlie, and your words sound strange; you who but a short time ago were the soul of honor, you who protested you would not wed me and make me a dependent on your father's bounty. I remember now the bright gleam in your eyes as you said you would go forth and win a place for us in the world; and now Charlie, within a few brief months how all has changed; nothing remains but your features; even the expression of face is changed; your voice, your mode of thought, the gleam in your eyes, your principles, all, all have changed; and this wonderful change has set me to thinking, and a strange suspicion has crept into my mind. I speak frankly; I will not conceal the truth."

Quickly, and in an alarmed tone, the young man exclaimed:

"A strange suspicion has crept into your mind, Emmie?"

The detective stood by and noted the words of both.

"Yes, a strange suspicion."

"Some one has whispered suspicions in your ear then, Emmie?"

"No, not a living soul."

"And what do you suspect?"

"I suspect that you deceived me in the first place."

"You suspect that I deceived you in the first place?" repeated the young man in a nervous tone.

"Yes."

"How?"

"It can not be that this change in your character has taken place in three short months. It is not possible!"

"What would you imply?"

"That you wore a mask."

"Explain!" said the young man, in commanding tones.

"I mean that you must have been bad before I knew you, that you pretended to be the noble character I once believed you to be; but in truth all the time you were at heart as you appear now!"

"That is a terrible accusation, Emmie."

"It is my firm conviction, Charlie. I came here to meet you to-night, resolved to speak plainly!"

"Yes, you are speaking very plainly," said the young man, in a bitter tone.

"I repeat," she continued, "it is impossible that you could have been transformed in a few brief months from a noble, honorable young man into a common burglar, a cruel monster, capable of aiming a weapon at the heart of his own father."

A moment's silence followed the fair girl's impassioned words, but at length the young man asked:

"Emmie, did you ever love me?"

"Did I ever love you? No woman ever loved man with greater intensity than I loved you."

"And do you love me now?"

"Do not force an answer to this last question," she replied.

"Yes, I must have an answer."

"I pray you let my answer remain unspoken."

"No, Emmie, you must answer me."

"When in your presence I am under the chain of the old love; this comes of my weakness as a woman; but when I am alone, with nothing but your monstrous career staring me in the face, I despise you!"

"Listen to me, Emmie; you wrong me."

"No, I do not wrong you. I can not wrong the man who could act as you have acted."

"Listen to me. I pray you become my wife; fly with me and reform me; make me again what I was when first we met."

"Were you to reform a thousand times I would never become your wife. Never could the terrible facts be blotted from my recollection. I could never forget what you were, or what it is possible you have become. No, no, we must never meet again on earth!"

"And this is your decision?"

"Yes, it is my decision."
 "You cast me off?"
 "Yes, I cast you off."
 "This is all your side of the story; now hear mine; I love you, I will not be cast off. You encouraged me to love you, and when you once won my love it was love eternal that you secured. Emmie, I will not be cast off, you must, you shall be my wife!"
 "Is this my former lover whom I hear speaking?"
 "Yes, it is your loving faithful Charlie."
 "Were I not gazing upon your face and looking into your eyes, I could not believe it; but I repeat, never shall we meet again after this night."
 "Emmie, do not tempt me."
 "Tempt you! What do you mean?"
 "I mean that no power on earth shall separate us. You go with me to-night."
 The girl turned deathly pale, and fixed her beautiful eyes fully distended upon the young man.
 "Charlie," she said, "I do not understand you."
 "My words are plain."
 "But you do not—you can not mean what your words would imply."
 "I mean all that my words imply."
 "Suppose I refuse to go with you? Indeed, I do refuse ever to see you again."
 "You must go with me."
 "Your words suggest force, outrage."
 "My words mean force!"
 "It can not be!" moaned the fair girl.
 "I trust force will not be required; but you go with me to-night to remain with me forever."
 "No, no!"
 "I have made all arrangements. I suspected the declarations to which I have listened from your lips. I am resolved not to give you up. I came here prepared to take you away with me."
 "Do you wish to take me when I declare that now I despise you?"
 "Ah, that is but a momentary sentiment. You once loved me; you will love me again. I know well what a woman's heart is. Yes, yes—you go with me to-night!"
 "Never!"
 "You shall!"
 "I will scream for help!"
 "No, you will not. I will smother your screams."
 "Listen to me, Charlie: I will resist this outrage to the death, and though you succeed you will only find a corpse upon your hands. I was a simple girl, but now I am a determined woman! Go your way and may you and I never meet again on earth."
 "This is all nonsense, Emmie; you are excited now, but you will think better of it to-morrow; my love so warm, so ardent, so pure, so intense, will reawaken yours, and you will some day bless the hour when I carried you off by force, if need be."
 "I already curse the hour I ever met you! No, no; I am an honorable woman! and were you a prince royal I would not wed you, covered as you are with the stains of crime!"
 "Be careful, Emmie. Restrain your words."
 "No, no, I'll not restrain my words! Could I provoke you to kill me I'd thank you; but I'll die before I ever become the wife of a common burglar, an assassin who would have shot down in cold blood his own father!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM HAWK crept nearer to the parties. He saw that an outrage was to be attempted, and he was thankful that he was present; but for his presence he felt that a crime would be committed, a wrong perpetrated, which could never be righted on earth.

The detective was even near enough to read the glance in the young man's eyes, and he saw that the villain was raging with fierce anger.

"Unsay those words, Emmie."

"Never! I repeat them with emphasis!"

"And yet you dare say I have changed?"

"No, I do not now believe that you have changed. I believe you were a villain when you first won my love. I believe you have been long living under a mask; all vestige of the love I once felt for you has disappeared; go, robber; go, murderer! and may my eyes never rest on your evil face again!"

"I am disposed to be forgiving, Emmie, but you may drive me too far; you may cause my

love to vanish, but you shall be mine all the same; yes, you may kill my love, but you can not deaden my admiration for your beauty. What was love may become a mad passion, but mine you are, and mine you shall be! will you come with me?"

"No, no, I will die first!"

"You shall go with me, dead or alive, mark well my words!"

"I have marked well your words, and what is more, I mark by your face you are not the same character I loved! you are a false fiend in human shape! so go your way and never cross my path again!"

"And these are your final words?"

"Yes."

"Your set decision?"

"Yes."

"Listen to one word, Emmie."

The man advanced close to the fair girl. The latter recoiled, when he said:

"Do not recoil from me, Emmie. It may be that I will go away alone; but I desire that you shall hear my words."

"Speak; I can hear you."

"The words I would speak I must whisper in your ear; permit me."

She stood as if rooted to the spot, and he advanced closer to her; then suddenly he leaped forward, clasped her in his arms and forced a silk handkerchief to her nostrils. Without a murmur she fell back, a helpless and unconscious victim, in his treacherous arms.

It was time for Tom Hawk to act, so he sprang forward, exclaiming:

"It's time for me to come on, Pell."

The robber, still holding the girl in his arms, turned and beheld the officer, and his hand grasped a weapon.

But the detective leaped forward, and, with his club, struck the weapon from his grasp, and raised the locust to deal the man a blow, when, with a curse, the scoundrel let the girl fall from his grasp, and sprang away and disappeared.

The detective could have dropped him, but there were reasons why he preferred to let the rascal go, and he turned his attention to the fair girl.

The latter was just recovering from the effects of the drug, and as the detective raised her up she murmured:

"Kill, kill me, and I will die blessing you!"

"Well, well, miss, this is the second time we have met, and under strangely similar circumstances," said the detective.

She sprang away and fixed her lovely eyes upon our hero.

"You are safe, my child; I arrived just in time."

"Who are you?"

"Do you not recognize me?"

"Your voice sounds familiar to me; but I am strangely excited."

"Well, I don't wonder that you are excited.

I am the man who found you on the road a few nights ago, and I am led to believe that one mystery is solved."

"One mystery solved, sir?"

"Yes."

"What mystery?"

"The mystery of finding a young lady after dark in a dead faint beside the road. Yes, yes, I reckon you had an interview with the same scoundrel who to-night left you as I found you."

"I see now."

"What do you see, miss?"

"I discern who you are."

"And who am I?"

"You are the detective who has been trailing the burglars."

"Yes, right to the minutest particular, miss, and it is lucky I was trailing the burglars, and more fortunate that I trailed one of them here, or what would have become of you?"

"Tell me, sir, what became of him?"

"I will answer your question later on, miss, but as an officer I have a few questions to ask you."

The girl stood pale, trembling and silent.

"How is it, miss, I find you keeping a late night tryst with a burglar?"

"Is he a burglar?"

"You know he is a burglar, and I am sorry you asked me that question. I would rather feel that I could trust implicitly every word that fell from your lips."

"Oh, sir! I will ask one favor."

"Speak."

"Do not ask me any questions. I am a poor, helpless, wronged girl, and there are reasons

why I can not speak, and I would not tell a lie. Spare me; I swear I am not allied to these bad men in their crimes, but I must be silent, spare me, do not ask me any questions, or I will be compelled to refuse to answer in the face of any consequences!"

"My dear young lady, there is no reason why you should not speak to me."

"Why should I speak to you?"

"Because I am your friend; you need a friend now, and there is no one else in whom you can confide."

"You are a stranger to me, also, sir!"

"Well, yes, in one sense. But listen. Circumstances sometimes make strange friends. You and I have met under strange circumstances. I know a part of your secret—the worst part; your own good name demands that the brighter side of the story should be told to me."

"I must remain silent."

"No, you shall not remain silent; you are now a hopeless woman, but I can renew a hope in your heart."

"Renew a hope in my heart, sir?"

"Yes, the brightest and dearest hope of your life."

"Never, never!"

She spoke in a tone of extreme sadness.

"If you knew me better, miss, you would trust me. But you must, you shall trust me, and listen; you will never regret your confidence."

"No, no; I must remain silent."

"Do you think that by remaining silent you will save the man who would have done you such great harm? If so, dismiss the thought; it is for your sake and the sake of another that he is free now. I could have put my hand on him to-night, but I let him go."

A strange look came to the girl's face.

"You followed him here?"

"No; I followed you here."

"Followed me?"

"Yes."

"Why did you follow me?" demanded the girl, in trembling tones.

"Because I suspected you were to meet him."

CHAPTER XIV.

A low cry burst from the girl's lips as she exclaimed: "I am lost!"

"No, my child; you are saved! I followed you to rescue you!"

"What strange mystery is this?"

"I know all your story."

"You know all my story?"

"Yes."

"What do you know?"

"I know you are an honorable girl. I know that you imagined once that you loved this scoundrel!"

"You were present during our interview?"

"I was not far away; professional duty was my license, and I overheard every word that passed between you and that man."

"Then, sir, if you are an honorable man I have your sympathy. When I gave my love to that man I thought him to be an honorable man, one of the noblest men among the best, and my heart was broken when I discovered the sad truth!"

"My dear girl, listen to me; mark well my words, for some day you will recall with pleasure all that I speak!"

"Never, sir! never again will joy come to my heart in this life!"

"That is all right, as you feel now; and according to what you know now, your conviction is warranted, but you do not know what I know; you do not suspect what I suspect, and among the first of my suspicions is that there is still a great joy in the near future for you; but you must trust me; you must consider me your friend, and in that way aid me to obtain for you once again peace and happiness!"

"Never! never!"

"Well, we shall see! I am a strange man, and I have had large experience in my time, and I have been cognizant of very strange and remarkable occurrences."

"I see what you mean; you hope that this young man may be redeemed, but mark my words; I would be happy to know that he had reformed, happy to know that he had repented and thereby made others happy. I could forgive him; but ever love him again? Never! Ever become his wife? Never! Ever be happy again after my terrible experience? No, never!"

"My child, I do not take much stock in the

reform of that two-faced villain, and I do not look to bring happiness to you from that quarter! No, no, but remember I am a man who does not speak unadvisedly, and I hope to come to you some day and ask, 'Are you not happy?' and I expect to hear you answer, 'The world contains not a happiness greater than mine!'"

"You talk in enigmas to me."

"Some day my words will be plain enough, but, come, now, when you are assured of all I know, and no one knows as much of your affairs as I, will you not confide in me?"

"Yes, I will confide in you. I am convinced that you are a true and kindly man, and although I do not expect that it is within the range of possibilities for you to make good your dream picture, to make it a living reality, still I will trust you."

"And you will answer my questions?"

"So far as I can, yes."

"How long ago was it that you parted with Charles Pladwell?"

The girl looked at the detective in a puzzled manner, and said:

"Certainly you know that it is not more than ten minutes since."

"No, no; you do not understand. I mean before Charles became a burglar. I mean when he first went away after the quarrel with his father."

"It is a little over three months."

"Up to that time you believed him to be an honorable young man?"

"Yes, one of the most honorable young men I had ever met; brave, true, refined, and generous."

"He was not given to coarse expressions?"

"His language was always pure and refined; but why do you ask?"

"I have a reason for asking; and now you let me do the questioning; your turn will come. Up to the time that you parted with your lover, he had always appeared the same?"

"Yes."

"Gentle, considerate, and delicate?"

"Always."

"His manners were entirely different from what they are now?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak French?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"You never heard him speak French?"

"Never; but he may."

"When he parted with you, what was the understanding?"

The girl blushed, but answered promptly:

"There was but one understanding between us."

"And that was—"

"We were to remain faithful to each other under all circumstances."

"Have you ever heard from him since he went away?"

Again a puzzled look came into the girl's face.

"I do not understand you," she said.

"Ah, yes, I remember! I mean did he ever write to you?"

"Never."

"You never received a letter indicating his intentions?"

"No."

"You never heard of him directly or indirectly?"

"I received on my birthday a bouquet of flowers; they came from New York by express, but the donor never inclosed his card, and I was only permitted to suspect that it was a delicate remembrance from him."

A bright look came over the detective's face when he received the information concerning the flowers.

"How long ago was it that the flowers came?"

"About two months ago."

"And he knew of your birthday?"

"Yes."

"Did he ever allude to the flowers since you have seen him lately?"

She turned deadly pale, and in a gasping tone, replied:

"What are you seeking to establish?"

"Never mind what I am seeking to establish. You are to answer my questions, not ask questions."

"He never alluded to the flowers."

"There were naturally many little confidences between you and him?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Did he ever, since you made these terrible

discoveries concerning him, allude to any of these little confidences?"

The girl was ghastly pale, and her voice trembled as she answered:

"On the contrary, when I alluded to certain little confidences and incidents to be remembered, he appeared to have forgotten them."

Again the bright, pleased look shot across the detective's face.

"Am I to understand that in becoming a villain his whole demeanor has changed?"

"Yes, assuredly; in the most strange and remarkable manner."

"Even the tones of his voice have changed?"

"Most singularly, yes; and that is a fact I can never explain."

"We may explain it all some of these days; you know men have a talent sometimes for disguising the natural tones of their voice."

"Yes; but you would think that there would come moments when they would forget their disguised tones, and speak naturally."

"That would depend upon the game they were playing."

"Sir, I would be dull if I did not discover the purport and design of your question."

"Well, what do you imagine is the design of my questions?"

"You wish to establish that this is not the man to whom I pledged my truth."

CHAPTER XV.

A FAR-AWAY look came into the detective's eyes, and for a moment he remained silent.

She broke the silence by asking:

"Is it not true?"

"I can only answer that there is a possibility that there may be some mistake?"

The girl's face was deadly pale as she said:

"The suspicion is not new to me, but alas! despite all the singular facts there is no question as to his identity."

"You are assured?"

"Yes, I am assured."

"And why are you so sure?"

"There is one little fact that puts aside the suspicion of a fatal resemblance."

"What is the fact?"

"I can not relate it to you; but, sir, as much as I would desire to hope otherwise, I can not. I know that the man who just left me is Charles Pladwell, the man whom I once thought noble and good, the man whom I once loved but whom I now despise."

"Will you tell me under what circumstances you met him?"

"Do you mean when I first met him?"

"No; since he has adopted the profession of a common burglar."

"I met him one afternoon when I was returning from a sail on the creek."

"You had no intimation of his coming to meet you?"

"No."

"And he came right forward and addressed you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Can you minutely describe to me just what occurred at that meeting?"

"It was just at twilight. I was returning from the river. I met him face to face. He was advancing toward me and I exclaimed:

"Why, Charles, where did you come from?"

"He put his fingers to his lips and motioned me to be silent, and at once offered me his arm and said:

"Come, we will take a walk."

"I was delighted to see him, and I took his arm and we walked up the road together."

"And what did he say?"

"He let me do the most of the talking."

"You asked him a great many questions?"

"Yes."

"Did he answer your questions?"

"No; he said, 'Never mind questioning me, tell me all the news.'"

"Did you at once notice something strange about him?"

"Not at once, no; I was too excited, but later on I did, and said to him, 'Charles, how you have changed!'"

"And what did he say?"

"He merely laughed."

"Proceed."

"I spent an hour with him, and I will admit that at that moment even a strange, weird suspicion flashed across my mind, and I studied his face closely, and I will confess that I looked for a certain scar, and I found it just under the forelock; there could not be two such

scars, and I was convinced that indeed it was Charlie."

"You spoke of some other evidence."

"Yes; I can not tell you now, but one fact is certain: there is no mistake; it is not a fatal resemblance—Charles Pladwell is a villain!"

"When did you discover that he was a burglar?"

"He made me understand that he did not desire the fact of his presence to be known; and he arranged for me to meet him clandestinely. I went to meet him the night of the robbery."

"The night I found you on the road?"

"Yes."

"Proceed."

"Oh! when shall I ever forget that night of horror?"

The girl ceased speaking.

"Proceed, Miss North."

"Oh, that I could forever remain silent!"

"You must not remain silent. And now let me say one word: despite all you have told me, I still indulge my suspicion."

"I can swear to his identity. That hope is a vain one."

"Proceed, and tell me what occurred."

"I was waiting for him when I heard voices and, after a moment, I recognized his. I stole forward to see with whom he was talking—"

She stopped short. Her face became even more ghastly in its expression, and her voice became husky as she uttered the last words.

"Proceed," said the detective.

"Oh, I can not!"

"You must."

"Spare me."

"It is for your own sake that I insist upon an answer."

"Charles was holding a consultation with his 'pals.'"

"Did you make your presence known?"

"No."

"And what did you overhear?"

"The plan for the robbery of his father's house fully discussed."

"Did Charles take part in the discussion?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak of the owner as his father?"

"No; but he did say that, if they were arrested, when worst came to worst, they would not be prosecuted."

The detective's own face turned pale.

"He said that, eh?"

"Yes."

"And what did the men say?"

"Every word is burned in on my memory."

"That is fortunate; repeat every word that was said."

"One of the men asked:

"What 'pull' have you got there?' and Charlie answered, 'Never mind; it's all right. There will be a surprise in that house if we are captured.'"

A dead silence followed the girl's last declaration, and the detective was thinking intensely.

"You see," said the young lady, after a moment, "he relied upon escaping prosecution when his father should recognize in the robber his own son."

"It would appear so, but I still adhere to my suspicion."

"You still think it is not his son?"

"I do; but go on, tell me all that passed."

"The men urged Charlie to explain just what he meant, but he would not."

"And you overheard all their plans?"

"Yes."

"Did you afterward meet Charlie that night?"

"Not at that time."

"You did not disclose your presence there?"

"No."

"How was it I found you insensible beside the road?"

"Charlie expected to meet me, and after the robbery conference he looked for me."

"And you concealed yourself from him?"

"Yes."

"And you succeeded in hiding?"

"He would have discovered me but for your sudden appearance, and the excitement and agitation caused me to fall insensible to the ground."

"And there I found you?"

"Yes."

"Then Charlie was not far off at that moment?"

"I do not know how long I remained unconscious, but he could not have been far off."

"And when did you next meet him?"

"You know."

"In the library at his father's home?"
 "Yes."

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAIN an awkward silence followed. They had reached a crisis in their talk. It was the detective who broke the silence with the remark, "He would have shot his father?"
 "I believe he would."
 "After his father had recognized him?"
 "Yes."
 "And you interfered to save the old gentleman?"
 "I did."
 "Have you seen him since that fatal night previous to your meeting with him here?"
 "Yes."
 "When?"
 "The day after the attempted robbery."
 "Where?"
 "He met me on the village street. He was in disguise."
 "And what did he say? What explanation did he offer for his conduct?"
 "He attempted to make me believe it was all a joke."
 "Did he inquire how it happened that you were in his father's house?"
 "Yes."
 "And what did you tell him?"
 "I told him how I had overheard a discussion of all his plans between himself and his companions."
 "And then what did he say?"
 "He said he was merely using those men as fools. Our interview was very brief and his later explanations you overheard."

The detective remained lost in thought for a long time, but at length he said:
 "Miss North, despite all you have said, I am still under the impression that the young man who was here is an impostor, and I will make it my business to establish the fact."

"You never can do so."
 "Well, we shall see; and now I will accompany you to your home."
 "No; I will return by boat."
 "You are not afraid to go alone?"
 "No."
 "Not even after the dastardly attempt to kidnap you?"
 "No; when I land I am practically right in the village, and besides, I do not expect another visit from him to-night."
 "You must never meet him again."
 "I never will."
 "It will be safer if you do not walk forth at night until after this strange mystery is cleared up; the moment I establish the fact that this man is not Charles Pladwell, I will close in on him and put him out of the way against further mischief."

"I am under deep obligations to you, sir."
 "Do not mention your obligations to me; but let me ask you one question: Do you know of the cause of Mr. Pladwell, senior's, hostility to you?"

"I have a suspicion."
 "And what is your suspicion?"
 "His mind has been poisoned against me."
 "By whom?"
 "To answer your question I would be compelled to relate my own history."
 "We have a few moments to spare, and it may serve your own interest if you were to tell me your history."

"It is commonplace enough, and can be told in brief: my father was a wealthy man—a widower—and I was an only daughter. I attended school with a young lady with whom I was very intimate, and during one of our vacations I paid a visit to her house; while there her brother professed to have fallen in love with me; I rejected him, and he became persistent, and in the end I was compelled to dismiss him from my acquaintance in the most imperative manner, and, as a result, I incurred the hostility of his whole family. His sister, who had been my friend, became my most bitter enemy, and when my father failed in business and died, and I was thrown upon my own resources, the enmity of that family pursued me, and I lost several positions through their means. I left New York and procured a position with the family where I am now engaged, and my enemies, coming to this town as summer visitors, tried to injure me here; my employer, however, had known my father, and was not influenced by them; but they are intimate with

the Pladwells; the sister of whom I speak, my former friend, is very intimate with Mr. Pladwell's daughter, and I can well see how a prejudice has been created against me."

"I am glad you have told me this tale; the stories told against you have been more hateful than you imagine; you have been represented as a dangerous and designing siren, and Mr. Pladwell believes at this moment that you are the means of making his son a burglar."

"I doubt it not."
 "Yes; the old man thinks you are one of the vilest creatures alive."

"Well, well, as it has turned out, my enemies, after all, may have done me a service. Had they not maligned me, I might have been at this moment the wife of that man who would not spare even the life of his own father."

"We can not tell. This is indeed a strange and mysterious affair, and I am determined to get at the bottom of it. One thing is certain—absolutely certain: the young man who was engaged in the burglary is no novice at the business; he is an experienced burglar. He has been the associate of criminals for years."

The young lady seized the detective's arm, and there came a wild, startled expression over her beautiful face as she demanded:

"Do you know your last statement to be true?"

"I can not substantiate it now with the requisite proofs; but, in my own mind, I am as well satisfied that it is true, as that I am talking to you at this moment."

"You are mistaken—you must be mistaken!"

"I am so well satisfied that it is true, that I would stake my very existence upon it!"

"It can not be true; but, if it were—"

The girl stopped.
 "Well, if it be true?"

"Then there is some terrible mistake somewhere, and, if your other suspicions are correct, and you would stake your life that the young man who committed the assault upon me is no novice in crime, I would stake my life that, three months ago, Charles Pladwell was an honorable young man."

"So I believe, and I believe the real Charles is an honorable young man now!"

"Then how can this wonderful—this terribly fatal resemblance, be explained?"

"That is one of those mysteries that can not be solved without data, but I am bound to secure the facts."

"How can you?"

"Well, we detectives have methods of our own."

"But where can you commence?"

"I can commence by investigating this young man who travels under the name of Pell."

"Is that the name Charlie assumes?"

"Yes."

The girl's face darkened.

"That statement dashes all my hopes."

"How so?"

"Pell is the middle name of Charles Pladwell."

The latter declaration was a sort of staggerer to the detective.

"Your statement deepens the mystery," he said.

"And your investigation will establish the identity of Pell as the real Charles Pladwell."

"Well, we shall see. Either way, I will go slow until one or the other fact is established. And now, miss, return to your home, and bide your time until you hear from me."

CHAPTER XVII.

TOM HAWK saw her down to her boat, and, as a parting warning, said:

"Remember you must keep close to your home until you hear from me."

She pulled off from the shore, and under the moonlight rowed down the creek, and as the detective stood and watched her, clad as she was in a white dress, she looked indeed like a fair angel gliding over the dark waters.

Our hero did not trust to her courage and confidence, and when she landed from her boat he was near by, and his eyes were upon her until he saw her enter her home.

About an hour subsequent to the incidents described, a farmer, seemingly under the influence of drink, entered a low resort kept by a mulatto, on the outskirts of the town. The keeper of the place was a desperate character, who had been many times arrested, and whom

the citizens had sought to drive from the place, but the fellow had been raised in the town, and he would not be driven away.

It was this, Jack Byron's place, that the seemingly inebriated young farmer entered. It was well on toward midnight, but the place was open, and a number of dissolute young men were gathered round; some were playing cards, others were rapping away on a miserable old pool-table, and others were standing before the bar drinking and talking politics.

The young farmer staggered into the place, and, advancing to the bar, called for a drink, and invited all hands to join him. The man was evidently a stranger to the habitués of the place, but they were gladly ready to accept an invitation to drink.

Among those standing around the counter was a young man with light hair, fine eyes, and well dressed. He was not taking any part in the conversation, but appeared to be an interested listener.

The young farmer acted in the foolish manner peculiar to some rurals when under the "influence," and after a time appeared to take a particular fancy to the young man with the light hair. The latter was rather effish until the young farmer displayed a tempting roll of greenbacks, when he melted and became quite sociable. The two drank several times together, the young farmer putting up every time.

At length the party thinned out, until there only remained the young man with the light hair, and two others, when the farmer shocked and startled the owner of the place by asking the question:

"Byron, were you in that burglary racket up at the Castle?"

The man addressed turned pale with anger, but did not deign to make any reply, and after a final drink the farmer started to go home. He took a lonely road toward the mountains, and had not gone far before he discovered that he was being followed.

"Aha! just as I thought!" he muttered, "the bait draws the fish!"

There was no sign of inebriation in the young farmer's tone as he spoke, but he still staggered along like a man well gone in liquor.

At length he reached a point in the road where it had been cut through a solid wall of rock, and there was no house within a quarter of a mile. He still staggered on until finally he heard rapid steps behind, and an instant later two men sprung upon him. As the men sprung forward the farmer turned, and drawing a club downed one of the men so quickly that the fellow fell off into a deep unconsciousness without knowing what had struck him.

The second rascal was quickly caught and disarmed.

"Over the mountain."

"Why did you pull on me?"

"Well, mister, I've got you dead, haven't I?"

The fellow addressed was the light-haired man with whom the farmer had been talking in such a friendly manner less than an hour ago, and strangely enough all signs of drunkenness had disappeared from both men.

"Don't shoot!" cried the highwayman.

"Well, you are a nice duck, ain't you?" said the farmer.

"So I was drinking and spending my money with a robber, eh?"

"No."

"Do you live out this way?"

"Yes."

"Where do you live?"

"Over the mountain."

"Why did you pull a pistol on me?"

"Because you knocked my friend down."

"Oh, that was the reason, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you had no intention of robbing me?"

"Certainly not."

"And you are an honest man?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then I was too quick, wasn't I?"

"Yes, you were."

"Well, I think I was too quick for you, Pell!"

Upon hearing the name the fellow gave a start.

"Ah, you did not think that I knew you?"

"Who are you?"

"Well, I am a lad who can't be taken in by a fellow like you!"

"You were only playing drunk?"

"You're right there."

"You are disguised?"

"Am I?"
 "Yes."
 "So are you, and I want you to haul that wig off, and let me see who you look like, anyhow."
 "Don't put your hands on me."
 "Don't put my hands on you, eh? Well, now, young man, I just will put my hands on you if you do not get that wig off in a jiffy, and show up in your true colors!"
 "You're Hawk!" said the thief.
 The detective laughed and answered:
 "It's unfortunate for you, my friend, you did not make that discovery sooner."
 The robber turned pale, and he glanced around in a furtive manner.
 "My good fellow, I've got you this time, got you dead to rights. I've been laying for you a long time, and now mark my words, don't attempt any funny business, or you are a dead man."
 A curse fell from the man's lips. He saw that indeed he had been nicely caught.
 "I want a little talk with you, Pell."
 The young man pulled off his wig and stood revealed as Charles Pladwell.
 The detective did not show any signs of surprise.
 "Look sharp at me," said the robber.
 "I'm looking at you, young man, looking to see that you don't get away, as the first skip you attempt to take will be your last."
 "Do you not recognize me?"
 "Yes, I recognize you."
 "Then you know I'm no robber."
 "Eh?"
 "You must see you are mistaken."
 "I am mistaken."
 "Yes."
 "How so?"
 "I am not Pell, the man you want."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It don't make any difference to me whether you are Pell or not—you are the man I want."
 "Why do you want me?"
 "Because you are one of the gang who made the raid on the Castle."
 "What is it to you?" said the robber.
 "My words are plain."
 "Has my own father given me away? Is it robbery to enter my own father's house?"
 "Eh? What's that you are saying? Who is your father?"
 "It is evident you do not recognize me."
 "I recognize you as an old-time thief."
 "No, sir; I am not a thief."
 "You are not a thief, eh? Well, they all say that when they are caught."
 "I am not a thief."
 "You did not follow me to rob me?"
 "No, and I can prove I did not; and if you have killed that man there, you will suffer."
 "You think so, eh?"
 "Yes, I do."
 "This matter can be fixed, Hawk."
 "What matter?"
 "This charge of attempted burglary."
 "How can it be fixed?"
 "Go and see my father."
 "See your father?"
 "Yes."
 "Where will I find him?"
 "I am Charles Pladwell."
 "You are Charles Pladwell?"
 "I am."
 "You miserable villain! how dare you tell me such a bare-faced falsehood?"
 "It's the truth."
 "You, a confessed burglar, claim to be Charles Pladwell?"
 "Yes; but I am not a confessed burglar."
 "What are you?"
 "A gentleman."
 "Whew!" ejaculated the detective, "you a gentleman!"
 "Yes, sir, I am."
 "And do gentlemen attempt to burglarize gentlemen's houses?"
 "There was not an attempt to burglarize a gentleman's house."
 "You were at the Castle the other night?"
 "Yes, I was."
 "In company with two notorious cracksmen?"
 "Yes, I was."
 "You admit that?"
 "Yes."

"What were you doing there?"
 "I was there to obtain my rights."
 "To obtain your rights? Explain."
 "My father has certain papers belonging to me which he refuses to surrender, and I determined to secure them at all hazards; they are mine, and I mean to have them!"
 "You are a cool-headed villain!"
 "The day will come when you will regret all you say to me! the Pladwell estate is all mine; my father keeps it from me wrongfully."
 "Well, you have got a check! Where did you learn your trade, in London or Paris?"
 The young man turned pale and showed signs of great nervousness.
 "Aha!" thought the detective. "I got a shot in that time between wind and water!"
 "I never was in London or Paris in my life."
 "You never were, eh?"
 "Never."
 "Well, I believe you, but Charles Pladwell was in London and Paris."
 "My uncle?"
 "Eh?" said the detective.
 "My uncle was in London and Paris."
 "When?"
 "When he was a young man."
 "And you were never there?"
 "Never there to learn the trade of a burglar."
 "Where did you learn the trade?"
 "I am not a burglar."
 "Look here, young man, you are in a bad hole; now what's your game?"
 "I will have nothing more to say to you."
 "Oh, you won't, eh?"
 "I will not."
 "That's all right; but you are my prisoner all the same. I've been looking for you and I've got you at last!"
 "Let me ask you one question?"
 "Proceed."
 "Does my father know you were seeking to arrest me?"
 "I know nothing about your father. Mr. Pladwell ordered me to secure you if I could."
 "It's false!"
 "Be careful, young man, what you say."
 "I repeat my words; my father did not order you to arrest me, and he will not appear against me if you do!"
 "He will not appear against you?"
 "No."
 "I don't ask your father to appear against you; but Mr. Pladwell will appear against you, and he will identify you as one of the burglars, and so will Miss North."
 "Your name is Hawk?"
 "Yes, my name is Hawk."
 "You are a detective?"
 "Yes, I am a detective."
 "Well, Mr. Hawk, detective, I've something to tell you."
 "Proceed."
 "You are meddling in a matter which will get you into trouble."
 "I am taking all those chances; but I've a little whisper to drop into your ear."
 "Speak."
 "There's a chance for you to get out of this scrape you're in, or you will go up for twenty years."
 "You will find out you are mistaken."
 "No, I will not find out I am mistaken. I know your game, young man, and you can't work it while I am around."
 "I have no game, and my father and I are reconciled."
 "Bah! you need not tell that nonsense to me; take my advice and get out of this scrape."
 "How can I get out of it?"
 "Confide in me."
 "Confide in you?"
 "Yes."
 "What do you mean?"
 "Tell me who you are, and how it happens you chance to look so much like the real Charles Pladwell?"
 "I am Charles Pladwell."
 "If you are Charles Pladwell you will go to Sing Sing for twenty years, sure."
 "My father will save me, and turn against you. Now it's your time to make some money."
 "I've money enough."
 "My father does not want my little wild racker exposed, and he will pay you well."
 "He will, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "How do you know?"
 "He told me so."
 "When?"

"This very day."
 "Your father told you that, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "And you saw him the past day?"
 "Yes."
 "Where?"
 "I went home and saw him. I confessed all to him, and he is on my side."
 "Will you go with me and see your father?"
 "I will meet you there."
 "When?"
 "To-morrow."
 "At what hour?"
 "Any time you say."
 "Who is that man?"
 "A fellow I met at the tavern."
 "And is he an honest man?"
 "As far as I know."
 A moment the detective remained silent and thoughtful.

CHAPTER XIX

THE detective was revolving in his own mind just how he should act under the circumstances. He did not wish to arrest the young man at that moment. He preferred to let him run free until he had made certain further investigations. Tom Hawk believed the young man spoke the truth when he said he had seen Mr. Pladwell, and he was willing for a time to let certain matters run until he was prepared to explode his mine. At length the detective said:
 "See here, Pell, why not take advantage of your opportunity, and make a friend of me?"
 "I've a better friend."
 "Who?"
 "My father."
 "You are set to work that scheme, eh?"
 "It's no scheme."
 "If you are all right with your father, why did you not remain home? Is Byron's the proper place for the son of Mr. Pladwell?"
 "My father thought it better that I should not show up at once."
 "He did, eh?"
 "Yes."
 The man whom the detective had knocked down began to show signs of returning consciousness, and our hero fell to his plan.
 "You will meet me to-morrow at your father's?"
 "Yes."
 "All right, I will take your word, and meet you there; but you are making a mistake; in the end I will explode your game, and then there will be no chance for you; indeed, you may fool every one else, but you will never fool me. I am on your track, and I'll have your record. There is a chance for you, if you own up; but drive me to the discovery, and woe be tide when the day comes for me to close in good-night, young man, when you and I meet again, we will understand each other much better, and I will know just how to act."
 The detective walked away, and left Pell with his pal.
 The moment the detective had disappeared from sight, the man who had been knocked down sprung to his feet.
 "Well, that was a sell!" he said.
 "We're a pair of fools that we didn't tumble."
 "I should say so; and now there's only one thing for us to do, and that is 'fil.' We can't do anything for Cheesy and Snagsy now that Night-Hawk has got us down so fine."
 Thus talking together, the two men returned to the village, Pell remarking at the last moment:
 "We're all right; the old man stands between me and Hawk, and will stand there until my scheme is over. I don't leave here until I get those papers. I've a big surprise for Hawk yet, in spite of all his wit and cunning."
 Meantime, the detective retired to his burrow. He was indeed puzzled, though still satisfied, indeed fully convinced, that Pell was not Charles Pladwell; it had dawned upon him that there was a mystery within a mystery, that there was a point he had not "got on to" yet, and he was still determined to go slow until the clouds had rolled away a bit.
 Upon the morning following the incident we have related, the detective mounted his horse Badger, and rode up to the Castle. He found Mr. Pladwell at home, and was shown to the library. Our hero had seen the gentleman but once since the night when the attack upon the mansion had been made.
 The two men were seated some seconds be-

fore either opened the conversation, when the detective said:

"Well, sir, I have come to talk over matters with you."

"Have you captured the third burglar?"

"Yes."

"Ah, good!"

Tom Hawk was astonished.

"I captured him, and let him go."

"You let him go?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"At your request."

"At my request?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"I captured the young man last night, and he said he had seen you during the day, and you had expressed a desire that he might be set free."

"And could you release a prisoner upon my request?"

"I did under the peculiar circumstances."

"You did not do your duty!"

"Are you anxious to have your own son arrested?"

"He is not my son."

"He is not your son?"

"He is not! He is an impostor!"

There was a cold gleam in the eyes of Mr. Pladwell, and a hardness in his voice when he spoke, an unnatural hardness, and the detective mentally exclaimed:

"Aha! Here is another mystery, but I will get through all these webs in the end."

"You are satisfied he is not your son?"

"I am!"

"When did you reach that conclusion?"

"Within an hour."

"Did you see the young man yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Did he come here?"

"I met him on the grounds."

"And you had a talk with him?"

"Yes."

"And you were then convinced that he is not your son?"

"No; I was not convinced then, but I am now."

"Fully convinced?"

"Yes."

"And you wish me to arrest him?"

"That is your own business."

"But suppose he claims to be your son after arrest?"

"I shall deny the truth of his claim."

"But are you prepared to disprove that he is your son?"

"Will it be necessary?"

"Yes."

"How can I do it?"

"There is a way to do it."

"How?"

"Produce your son in court."

"But I do not know where my son is; I may hear from him."

"Until you do, this man will be accepted as your son, as the resemblance is so striking."

"But you first suggested that he is not my son?"

"I know I did; but I have since fuller evidence that makes it appear that he is your son."

"He is not, I am assured, fully assured."

The detective had changed his tactics. He originally had sought to convince Mr. Pladwell that the burglar was not his son, and had suddenly veered round.

"If this young man is not your son, who is he, sir? You must have some suspicion?"

"I have no suspicion."

"Mr. Pladwell, you may as well confide in me. Some day the truth will come out—this wonderful, this even more than twin-like resemblance is explainable, and you must have some suspicion as to how it arises."

"I have no suspicion."

"Then I with others must believe the young man is your son, and I shall arrest him?"

"Do your duty, sir."

"I wish you to fully consider all the consequences."

"I have considered all the consequences, but I will ask what will be the penalty for his crime?"

"Twenty years in jail."

"Well, sir, do your duty!"

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a strange gleam in the eyes of the master of the house when he said, "Do your duty!" and the detective was satisfied

that the gentleman had made some strange discovery; that he *desired* to have the burglar arrested.

"No matter who the young man may be, he will go to jail as your son!"

"He can not, when I repudiate the relationship."

"Your repudiation in the face of the extraordinary resemblance will amount to nothing unless the real Charles is produced, and even then a great difficulty will arise to establish the identity."

The master of the house appeared deeply agitated, as he said:

"How can that be?"

"Because you have once proclaimed the burglar to be your son!"

"To whom?"

"To me."

"To you only?"

"No."

"To whom else?"

"Miss North."

"Ah! I see it all now!"

"What do you see?"

"She is in the conspiracy?"

"Ah! you suspect a conspiracy?"

The gentleman turned red in the face, betraying the fact that he had made an admission he had not intended; he made no answer to the detective's query.

"You do not answer me, sir?"

"I will talk with you at some future time."

"That means our present conference is at an end?"

"At present I have nothing more to say."

"Then I am to understand that you desire me to arrest the burglar, Pell?"

"Yes."

"And push the charges against him to the full extent of the law?"

"Yes."

"All right, sir; you have given me a cue; I shall know how to act."

The detective left the house, and mounting his famous horse Badger, rode down toward the village; as he rode along he was met by two men driving in a buck-board wagon; the men looked like workmen, but our hero went under their appearance, and made a startling discovery.

Arrived in the village, he stabled his horse, and took a stroll through the town.

Tom Hawk was not known in the village under his real character. He was stopping at a boarding-house, and had let it go out that he was an invalid sojourning in the country for the benefit of his health, and that his horseback rides were taken for the same purpose. The detective arranged for his absences at night, by stating that he had a friend some miles away across country, with whom he remained overnight occasionally.

Our hero's changes and transformations were all worked when absent from his lodging-house, and not even Miss North nor any one else recognized him under the character of the invalid gentleman, as the bold night-rider who scoured the country in the track of the roving bands of burglars, members of the one organized gang.

Tom Hawk had set out to "nip" every member of the gang. He intended his work to be thorough, and he had gathered many little "tips" which occasion had not as yet necessitated the utilization of, but he meant, to "close in" on a general raid at the right time, and show in the end that for the weeks he had been "hanging around" he had not been idle.

He wandered through the town, and met several groups of summer tourists, and finally he passed two loud-looking men who were following two young ladies on their way to the creek, as the inlet from the river was called.

An unuttered exclamation rose to the detective's lips as his eyes fell upon the two men, and he turned in his walk, and quietly followed in the direction taken by the two young ladies.

The latter kept upon their way, evidently unconscious, in their innocence, that they were being followed.

Tom Hawk was a deceptive-looking man, and gotten up as an invalid, he was young-looking, and no one would ever have dreamed, when gazing upon the pale-faced, seemingly slender, weak man, that he was one of the most powerful and formidable men in the fraternity. Indeed, the detective often took advantage of his ability to assume an effeminate appearance to work some of his gamest tricks.

The young ladies did not enter a boat at the creek, but took a walk along its shore, and it

soon became evident that they were out for a good long stroll.

Tom Hawk had recognized the two men whom he had seen following along after the girls. He knew them to be two vile "birds of prey," and he set to "pipe" the parties, determined, if an opportunity offered, to give the "birds" the worst plucking they had enjoyed for a long spell.

The detective had other reasons for following the party. He was satisfied in his own mind that the "birds of prey" were in the neighborhood on other business than merely trailing two fair young girls; and the detective was also satisfied that a nice little scheme could be worked in connection with the accidental discovery.

The girls wandered on, and the men followed, and soon the party had reached quite a lonely and remote spot.

Tom Hawk saw the two dodgers exchange a few words, and then quicken their pace; and he also quickened his steps, and secured a position from whence he could observe all that passed.

The girls had come to a halt, and had thrown themselves to rest after their long walk on the sward under the shade of a clump of trees, when the two men approached and addressed them.

The faces of the men were not inviting, and the girls were scared from the start, and one of them, in her excitement, commenced to remove her ring and other articles of jewelry, to hand over without even waiting a demand for them.

The men disdained being robbers, and sought to allay the fears of the ladies, and partially succeeded; and all might have gone well had not the rascals betrayed themselves by a too sudden and undue familiarity.

One of the rascals boldly attempted to kiss one of the young ladies. His impudence and familiarity were indignantly repulsed. The girls saw through the men and were frightened.

The moment had arrived for the interference of the detective. He sprang forward, and called out:

"Hold on there, you scoundrels! What are you doing?"

The two men at once desisted, and the girls seeing that help had come, ran away like two deer, leaving our effeminate-looking Hawk to fight the two "birds of prey."

The scoundrels were mad, and one of them demanded:

"Who are you, and what in thunder do you mean in making such a hullabaloo to scare those two young ladies?"

"It's all right," said the detective, "it's all right; the young ladies are gone!"

"Well, it ain't quite all right, mister!"

"Eh! how so?"

"You owe us an apology; we're two gentlemen."

"I do not think you were acting like gentlemen."

"Those ladies are friends of ours; it was your halloo that scared them away!"

"Ah! is that it?" quietly responded our hero.

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE was something peculiarly aggravating in the tones and manner of the detective when he said, "Ah! is that it?" and one of the men said:

"That is the fact; and now, mister, you will please apologize!"

"Apologize?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"Calling us scoundrels."

"Did I call you fellows scoundrels?"

"Yes, you did."

"When?"

"When you first hallooed to us."

With the most aggravating coolness the detective said:

"I got it right the first time, didn't I?"

The man approached our hero and demanded:

"Dare you repeat the epithet?"

"Certainly, I dare."

"Let's give him a toss in the river, Billy," suggested one of the men.

"I'll be hanged if it ain't a good idea, Jerry."

The detective pretended to be very much scared, and made a move as though to go away, when one of the men called:

"Hold on, mister; you can't go away so fast."

"I am not going away fast; but I can not remain here. I have an engagement."

"Yes; you have an engagement with us."

"Gentlemen, I hope you will do no violence."

"Ah, Jerry, he calls us gentlemen now, that's right; but he called us scoundrels a moment ago, and we must punish him."

Tom Hawk assumed an appearance of absolute terror, and the two men laughed heartily; they enjoyed the gentleman's fright hugely.

"Come, Jerry, let's take him to the river."

The two men advanced and seized hold of the detective; the latter appeared ready to faint, and too weak to offer resistance.

The men started to lead him away toward the river bank, and as they walked him along between them one said:

"You're a nice duck to act as the rescuer of two young ladies!"

"You gentlemen can not be in earnest; you do not intend me any harm?" pleaded the detective.

"Oh, no, we do not intend you any harm; can you swim?"

"No, no!"

"That's what we thought, and we're going to teach you, so that when some lady falls overboard you can leap in to the rescue; as you appear to fancy that sort of business, we're going to teach you the trade."

"You can not mean what you say?"

"Oh, yes, we do mean what we say."

"I do not wish to learn how to swim."

"But you must learn."

"But I can not remove my clothing; you know at any moment people may come along here."

"Oh, that's all right, you need not remove your clothing; we've a patent process for teaching fellows like you how to swim with their clothes on."

"I protest, gentlemen, I protest!"

The rascals laughed, and in this merry mood they reached the bank; they stood on either side of the detective and placed their hands upon him.

"One, two, three!" they exclaimed, and a most singular *dénouement* followed.

As they called "One, two, three!" they made a move to throw the detective over the bank, but the latter suddenly darted under their arms, sprung back a step, and then leaped forward, encircling the waists of the two men, and with a rush he ran toward and over the bank, and the two scamps went floundering into the still, green waters of the river. The movement was executed so quickly that the two men did not know what was occurring until they found themselves floundering in the water.

As the men came up from their plunge and looked back, they beheld the detective standing on the bank with folded arms watching their floundering as serenely as though they were a pair of ducks taking their matutinal wash.

They scrambled to the bank, and, with curses on their lips, made a rush for the detective, but a most wonderful metamorphosis had taken place in the appearance and behavior of the latter.

As the men rushed toward him he let out in true Sullivan style, and Jerry went over the bank head first, and an instant later Billy followed; both men had been knocked into the river by a square hit from the shoulder, and, as they came a second time to the surface, there stood the detective with folded arms, smiling as serenely as before.

A second time the rascals scrambled from the water, but they were not in such a hurry to rush on their foe.

"How do you like it?" demanded the detective.

They gazed at him in open-mouthed wonder! they were not large of stature, but they were athletic fellows, and had never witnessed such a display of careless strength before in all their lives.

"Well, shall I give you another toss, gentlemen?"

"I reckon it's our turn," said Billy.

"All right! Come along and give me a toss!"

The two men exchanged glances, and together sprung upon the detective, but both were knocked over so quickly that they did not have time to wink; the detective as he downed them again folded his arms and adopted the serene attitude.

The men were wet and disordered and they

presented two sorry figures as they regained their feet.

"Well, how is it now?" demanded our hero.

"Who are you anyhow?" demanded Billy.

"Why, don't you fellows know me?"

"No, we don't know you, and we'd like to make your acquaintance."

"Do you fellows remember Barnum's living skeleton?—well, I'm that fellow grown fat; and now shall we have some more exercise?"

"No, we've had enough."

"What are you fellows doing up around here, anyhow? It's my idea you're thieves."

"Be careful what you say!"

"Bah! I've no need to be careful when talking to two such scamps. And now 'git, leave town or I'll put the town constable on your tracks, and have you locked up and punished for your assault on the young ladies!"

The two men were glad to slink away, and as they did so the detective overheard one of them remark:

"Well, that was a go for us, Billy. That fellow is chain lightning, and he played us nice for a pair of galoots."

Tom Hawk returned to his lodgings and made preparations for an expedition. He had met several suspicious characters in town, and he made up his mind that a raid was intended.

That same night, under a proper disguise, he visited Byron's place, and found there the usual congregation of loiterers, together with several fellows whom he recognized as regular knucks.

Later in the evening two or three of the men strolled forth, and the detective followed, and was rewarded by "getting on to" a big robbery scheme.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOM HAWK had recognized one of the men as a notorious cracksmen—a fellow who had been suspected as a participant in several notable robberies—but he had escaped conviction, except in charges of minor importance.

The detective was compelled to walk very circumspectly in following the men, but he managed to trail them to a deserted barn where they entered to hold their confab.

We will repeat a portion of the conversation overheard by the detective.

"I say, Tom," said one of the men, after a talk which had been upon general subjects, "it's sort of risky to attempt to work a racket just now."

"Why so?"

"All the people are awake around here, and one more little scheme would lead to the organization of a vigilance committee."

The man called "Tom" was a desperate-looking scoundrel, and, as it proved, as cunning and shrewd as he was desperate.

"Now is just the time to 'spring a knob.' The last racket was a turn of the cards in favor of the other side. Cheesy and Snagsy are in 'hook,' and the 'blokes' around here think the gang is cleared out from this section."

"There is something in that, I will admit; but it don't strike me that the 'crib' is worth the 'spunk.'"

"You don't suppose I would propose a dive in for a few silver spoons, do you?"

"Well, hardly."

"You bet I know what I'm 'laying in' for, and although it don't look big, we've a chance for the tallest boodle that's been snaked this long time."

"It wouldn't appear so from my survey. The house looks like an ordinary farm-ranch, with no more in it than a few old-fashioned silver heir-looms at best."

"And that's just where you ain't posted. Now, I'll tell you something. I was 'doing Wall Street on feet,' when I saw an odd-looking old man sail into a big banking-house, and I says to myself, 'Tommy, my man, there's your weakfish!'"

So I just slides in and I goes to buy a little 'bullion,' and while I'm buying my little 'shine,' I overhears the odd little man chatter, and what I got was this: The old man's sister had a mortgage paid in for ten thousand dollars. She can't place the 'stuff,' and she's afraid to blow it into a bustin' savings-bank, and she makes up her mind to 'quod it' in 'governments,' and the old man is down to get the particulars for her, and while he gets 'em, you see, I gets 'em too; and when he leaves the banking-house, I start in for a pipe to learn where the ten thousand that the sister won't shove into the bank is 'nested.' I follow the old man and trails him to the little house where you think there's nothing but the silver spoons

and heir-looms. I lays under the window and hears the little family consultation, and I picks up the information that ten thousand in green backs—ten one-thousand-dollar bills—are nested under that roof. I took in the whole business, and the money is there yet, and it's the safest job to 'lift' it we ever had."

"Do you know where the money is concealed in the house?"

"No; they were close on that."

"Are you sure it is in the house?"

"Dead sure."

"Let me see; there are only the old woman and the young girl, her niece, in the house."

"That's all."

"And there ain't another house within a quarter of a mile."

"Your survey was all right there."

"Well, it looks like an easy job; but there will follow an earthquake, I'm thinking."

"When will you work the scheme?"

"To-night; no time to lose; they may send the greenies down and get the bonds."

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when our hero overheard the significant conversation that we have recorded.

"I wish we could work this thing without making it necessary for the wooden tailor to be called in."

"Bah! it's big money we're after, and we must not take any chances. We must go in for a clean 'throw off.'"

"The house is three miles from here?"

"Yes; and it is situated just good for our scheme."

"You are sure the money is in the house?"

"Yes."

"But suppose we can't find it?"

"We're bound to find it; you know we can take our time, and work a dead search with our slide-lamp."

"Just us three do the job?"

"Yes."

"And take the boodle between ourselves only?"

"You bet."

"Well, I'm one to go in the scheme."

The third man expressed his readiness.

"What time shall we be there?"

"Midnight will serve us, after the women have retired."

The three men held some further talk, going into details, and at length they adjourned to Byron's.

Tom Hawk was rejoiced that he had tumbled to the game, and he realized the necessity of being up and about his work at once.

He did not know exactly where the house lay which had been mapped for the tragedy; but he set about finding out, and he was just the man to work into a solid "tip."

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM HAWK had received an intimation from the robbers which enabled him to form an idea, and he soon located the house, and later on, mounted his horse and started for the objective point of the assassins.

He had driven but a mile and a half from town, when suddenly two dark figures sprung from the hedge bordering the road and bade him come to a halt.

"Hello!" muttered the officer in an undertone, "the woods are full of 'hem.'"

The night was very dark, and the detective could only distinguish that he had been halted by two rough-looking men.

"What do you want, my good fellows?" he demanded.

"Get down from your horse; we want to decide a bet."

"Aha," thought our hero, "here's a new kind."

There had been a number of valuable horses stolen from the country roundabout, and our hero at once made up his mind that the two men were a pair of horse thieves, and he regretted the fact that he was engaged in a life-and-death expedition, or he would have closed in on the two scamps.

"What have I got to do with your bet?"

"Well, I'll tell you, boss: my friend here has bet me he can jump over a horse, and as you're the first mounted man that has come along we want to borrow your animal a moment for the experiment."

Tom Hawk calculated his time, and remembering that he had fully an hour to spare, he decided to have a little sport at the expense of the two "horse snappers."

As we have informed our readers, Badger

was a wonder. Tom had owned him from a colt, and taught him a number of useful tricks, and the extraordinary natural intelligence of the animal aided him in the teaching.

The detective pretended to accept the fellow's declaration, appeared good-natured, and even interested, and asked:

"How much have you bet?"

"Ten dollars."

"How about the height of the horse? This animal of mine is pretty tall."

The men laughed and said:

"That's where I've got him. I was just looking for a high-hander, and I'm going to win."

"All right, you must settle your bet quickly, as I want to get along home in good season."

As he spoke he dismounted from his steed, and as he put his face close to that of one of the men, he could see a triumphant gleam in the fellow's eyes, despite the darkness.

"Let my friend hold the horse," said the jumper.

"All right," answered the detective, and he stepped to one side, when the robber made a leap and landed in the saddle, and at the same instant the man who had pretended to hold the horse stepped around, and with a club attempted to knock our hero down; but he had reckoned without his host, as the detective was prepared with a loaded riding-whip, and as he avoided the blow of the club, he dealt the fellow a rap which turned him over in the ditch. Singularly enough, in the darkness, the man on the horse made a mistake, thinking it was the owner of the horse who had been downed and not his pal.

"Did you drop him, Jim?"

The detective gave an affirmative grunt, but not a direct answer. The fellow was still deceived and bade the horse get up.

The intelligent animal did not move a step.

"Hello!" exclaimed the horse-thief, "he is a barker, eh?" and he struck the animal a violent blow, when the beast reared, dashed forward, came to a sudden halt, and again made a spring forward. As he did so the horse thief went flying over his head.

The man was not hurt, and rising to his feet ran to seize the animal's bridle. But Badger made a plunge at him with his fore feet, and the scoundrel was compelled to spring aside in order to save himself.

"The animal is a devil!" exclaimed the discomfited thief, thinking he was addressing his companion, and he set to speak soothingly to the horse, but every time he made an effort to approach Badger the animal went for him with his fore or hind feet, and finally, in his rage, the man drew a barker, exclaiming:

"I'll fix you, my dandy!"

Tom Hawk suddenly leaped forward and exclaimed:

"Hold on, Johnny."

The man uttered a curse and demanded:

"Ain't that you, Jimmy?"

"Jimmy lies down there in the ditch, and you'll drop where you 'cover' if you don't get that 'barker' out of your hands in about two seconds!"

The man raised his hand, but the night was dark, and Tom was looking out for him. He just went down for the old game with his little club. The horse thief uttered a yell and keeled over.

The horse thief squealed.

"Down with your barker!" said Tom.

The man chucked his barker to one side, and the detective said:

"See here, my friend, you did not take the right measure this time!"

"I reckon I didn't! You're the devil himself, and your horse spits fire from the lower regions."

"You've hit it to a nail head, and as you're not badly hurt, I'll bid you good evening! You're marked and so you had better get away from this section of the country as quickly as possible, or sunlight will see you in the lock-up and I'll turn in to see you sent up. So moosey! but take your friend with you, as there is a posse coming this way to-night and they'll not be as merciful as I have been!"

"You're a gentleman," said the thief, "and some day I may do you a good turn yet."

"You're a thief, and some day I may see you hang, but take warning from this night and never again attempt to steal a Pegasus from the region of fire!"

Without another word the detective leaped on his horse, and the good animal sped away as gently as a gamboling lamb.

Meantime the man who had been knocked into the ditch recovered his senses and came up to where his companion lay.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

"We tackled the wrong man and got burned that's what happened!"

"I heard a couple of blows."

"Yes, you did, and I got one that will give me a headache for a week."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"This was a bad go, old man; are you badly hurt?"

"I think not; give me your hand."

The man's pal assisted him to his feet, and the fellow raised him and examined his wound.

"Only a little tap," he said, in a cheering tone.

"We're in luck so far."

"Yes."

"Let's flit."

"You bet!"

"And I reckon we'd better take a long tramp."

"That's what he told me to do."

"Who?"

"The devil."

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"Well, I've an idea."

"Sing out your terror."

"We've run against Tom Hawk!"

"By all that's strange, I believe you're right, and why didn't he nip us?"

"Well, you may bet your bottom dollar that he had other business on hand or it would have been free board for us; but he gave me a warning."

"Told you to get away entirely?"

"Yes."

"He's a good man, we'll take his advice."

"He's a good man. He could have settled me. He's a dead shot, but he only set in to give me a bark. I've heard he won't down a man to silence unless he is compelled, and he takes long chances."

"A good man: a pity he wasn't in with us."

The horse-thief was compelled to chuckle as he said:

"It's more the pity we were not in with him."

The two men stole away in the darkness, and meantime the detective had made his way to the cottage of the widow and her niece, and was working to save a life, filled with a resolve if the chance came, to act the full rôle of the angel of vengeance.

He went under cover, and it was well on to ten o'clock when a miserable-looking tramp knocked at the cottage door.

Some time passed before the query came in a firm voice:

"Who is there?"

"Please open the door."

The door was opened, and a fair-faced handsome girl stood in the passage. She ran her eye over the tramp and demanded:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Shelter and food."

"It is late to come and ask for food."

"Need does not select its time."

"I can give you something to eat, but you must seek shelter for the night somewhere else."

"Can I enter?"

"No: I will bring you something to eat."

"Thank you."

She closed the door and stepped to the kitchen, and had just opened the cupboard when she heard a step, and turning, saw the tramp. The fellow had followed her into the kitchen.

She did not scream, but merely stepped to a rear door, opened it, and whistled; and in an instant an immense blood-hound, an animal of huge proportions, and with fiery eyes, leaped into the room.

"A fine dog!" said the tramp, coolly.

"Yes."

And the girl patted the animal on the head, while the beast kept its fiery eyes fixed upon the tramp, and a low growl struggled from between its jaws.

"I thought I would come in to eat, as I have something to say to you."

"I did not bid you enter: but since you are here, I will feed you."

"You are not frightened?"

"Certainly not. Why should I be frightened?"

"You are a brave girl, and that is good."

"I do not understand you."

"No; you do not understand me, but I am glad you offered me food. But, after all, it is not food I want."

"What do you want?"

She still spoke in a firm tone.

"Shelter."

"I told you that you must seek shelter somewhere else."

"You are a brave girl."

"You need not repeat your compliments. I am a brave girl, and I certainly am not afraid of you."

"Ah, you have no cause to fear me, and I am glad I am here—doubly glad, since you offered me food, since I have seen you."

She looked at the man suspiciously, and said:

"I do not understand you, and if you do not need food, go!"

"No, no. I've a few words to say to you."

"I can not listen to you any longer. You may be an honest man; you may be a rogue; your life is in my hands. I have but to speak one word, and this dog would tear you to pieces!"

"Do you value the dog?"

"Yes."

"Then do not speak the word. But come, Miss Knight, I wish you to make me a promise."

"What shall I promise?"

"Not to scream if I ask you a few questions."

"You need not fear; I will not scream."

"Where is your aunt?"

The girl had exhibited a little agitation when the man called her by name, and a deeper pallor overspread her face when he put this latter question.

"You know my name?" she said.

"Yes."

"And you ask about my aunt?"

"Yes."

"What business is it of yours where she is?"

"She sleeps?"

"I will not answer your question; and I now order you to leave my house!"

"I can not go."

"You must!"

"No."

"Be careful!"

"I shall stay here."

"If harm comes to you, it will be your own fault."

The girl was very pale, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"I shall not go!"

"Once more, go!"

"No!"

"It is your own fault!"

She took her hand from the hound, and with a yelp the fierce animal sprang at the tramp, but did not tear him to pieces, simply because the tramp was master of the dog. The animal made his spring, the tramp stepped to one side, seized the huge animal behind the ears, and held him in a grip of iron.

"See; I do not fear your dog."

In a firm tone, the girl asked:

"What is your purpose here?"

"I came with a purpose."

"To rob?"

"No."

"Why did you come?"

The detective still held the struggling dog, and finally mastered the animal, and caused him to remain quiet.

"I came here as a friend."

"You come in a peculiar guise, and I do not recognize you."

"It was needful that I should come in peculiar guise, and it is needful that I should win your confidence; and that it why I permitted you to set the dog on me. You and the dog are at my mercy."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Not as securely as you think," said the girl.

A pleasant smile played over the detective's face, and the girl saw the expression that gleamed in his eyes.

"You do not think you are in danger?"

"No."

"You are assured?"

"Yes."

"Why are you so sure?"

"Shall I speak plainly?"

"Yes."

"You are an honest man."
 "Eh!" ejaculated the detective.
 "You are an honest man."
 "How do you know?"
 "You are too brave to be a rogue, and your eye speaks in your favor."
 "Thank you; and, as you compliment me, I will say one word: You are the bravest woman I ever met, and I have often seen women brought face to face with seeming danger."

"Will you tell me why you came here?"
 "There are ten thousand dollars concealed in this house."

The girl gave a start; all her ideas of the tramp's honesty appeared to vanish, and for once she displayed signs of real terror.

She did not make answer.

"You will not admit it, and it is not necessary; but I know the money is in the house, and that is why I am here!"

And again the detective's face betrayed the pleasant smile.

"Who told you any such ridiculous story about money in this house?"

"It is well for you, and for your aunt, and for the possession of the money, that I'm here."

"Who are you?"

"Probably you never heard of me. My name is Hawk."

"The great detective?" ejaculated the girl.

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Ah! you thought so, eh?"

"I was prepared for some such declaration."

"All right; send the dog off. It's pleasant to talk to you, but hanging on to this beast is rather tiresome."

The girl called:

"Tiger, come here!"

The detective released his hold upon the huge animal, and the beast quietly walked over to his mistress.

"Put him out."

The girl opened the door and sent the dog out.

"Now, then, we can talk matters over. You are a brave, heroic girl, and I will open up. I accidentally learned that a gang of thieves had located this house for a lift to-night, and I came here to meet them when they come."

"Why did you come in this guise?"

"I did not want them to know I was coming," said the detective, with a sly glitter in his fine eyes.

"Why did you not announce your purpose at once, and save me this terrible ordeal?"

"I will tell you: I wished to gain your confidence. Had I come with a tale, you possibly might not have believed me; so I let you 'set' the dog on me, demonstrated that I meant no harm, and furthermore, I went beyond my original intentions, simply because I enjoyed the scene."

"But you subjected me to a very trying ordeal."

"Very good! You will be proud of the adventure some day; and now as to our plans."

"You are sure they intend to rob this house?"

"I am sure that a desperate gang have organized to do so."

"How did they discover there was money in this house?"

"I will tell you a strange story."

"Do, please."

The detective told of the visit of the old man to buy the bonds, or rather, to inquire about them, and how the thief had trailed him; and then again how the detective had overheard the robber relating his exploit. But he did not tell her how desperate the situation was, but her own declaration betrayed the fact that she fully realized the terrible peril.

"They might have murdered us!"

"Well," said the detective, "there is no telling what may happen when those scoundrels once start out."

"And you are here to protect us?"

"Yes; that is why I came here."

"And now what shall we do?"

"How about your aunt? Is she a particularly nervous person?"

"No, she is a lady of most excellent nerve."

"She has retired for the night?"

"Yes."

"Would it startle her particularly were you to wake her up?"

"Is it necessary?"

"Yes."

"Can not you and I manage this thing?"

"How would you manage it?"

"Send for several neighbors."

"There are several reasons why we can not adopt that plan."

"You know best."

"Well, yes; I have ciphered this affair down pretty fine, and should we attempt to notify some of your neighbors, we might notify the robbers at the same time."

"Ah, I see! You wish to capture them?"

"That is my idea."

"Can I not aid you, and can we not avoid disturbing my aunt?"

"The chances are your aunt might be disturbed under more exciting circumstances. No, no; that will not do, and there is no need for you to remain here. I can manage the matter alone."

"What would you have us do?"

"Arouse your aunt at once, and you and she both go to some neighbor's, and remain until I summon you."

"And leave you here alone?"

A curious expression came over the detective's face as he said:

"You must take the money with you, of course."

"Sir, you are unjust to me, and to yourself."

"How so?"

"You would insinuate that I did not have confidence in you; know now that I have the most implicit confidence in you, and will do whatever you say."

"My suggestion is the true one, and we have not much time to spare."

"Can I not remain?"

"No."

"Something may happen to you."

"Thank you for your solicitude on my behalf, but I am in the way of duty and business."

"What excuse shall I make to our neighbors?"

"I will leave that to your own ingenuity."

"Very well; I will act under your instructions."

"Go at once."

She left the room and the detective paced the kitchen floor.

A new sentiment had risen in his heart.

Tom Hawk was a man over thirty; a fine, generous, manly fellow; a regular bachelor indeed. He had never met a woman who had created one faint spark of sentiment in his heart, and here, within a few moments, he had met one of whom he had not even heard a few hours previously, and he had been but a half hour in her presence, and found himself experiencing emotions such as he had never experienced before in all his life.

He had been a man of business, a man who had lived a life of peril; but at the bottom he was kindly and good, and in the most unexpected manner he had met a fair girl whom he felt toward as he had never felt toward woman-kind before, and he muttered:

"She is the bravest woman I ever met!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FEW moments, and the girl re-entered the room, accompanied by an elderly lady. The latter was tall, and rather fine-looking, and to the detective she said:

"Sir, my niece has told me all; we owe much to you."

"Madam, it is one of those strange experiences of life; robbers exist, and so do detectives. By accident, the thieves came to make your home the objective point of a raid, and by accident in the way of duty, I fell to their plans, and you owe me no thanks, but rather I owe you thanks in permitting me to capture them."

"Are you not afraid to remain and meet them?"

"Fear, madam, is a quality which detectives leave behind at an early stage of their profession; no, I have no fear; I am only glad of a chance to capture a gang of the worst rascals who ever set out to rob a house. But no time is to be lost; the rascals may appear at any moment; they must not know I am here. They must not know that you leave the house, and I urge you to go out at once."

A few moments later and the detective was alone in the house, and muttering to himself, he said:

"It's all right; and now I'm ready for the comedy."

Tom put out all the lights, and ascended to the second floor. He drew his little masked lantern, and placing it so that its reflection would not go beyond a certain space, he set to work, and in a few seconds seemingly, a rather feeble-

looking old woman tumbled into the bed from which a real old woman had but recently risen.

All lights were extinguished and the detective's vigil commenced.

An hour passed when the keen ears of the detective fell to a certain sound, and in a husky voice, he muttered:

"They are here!"

Tom was a brave man, but he was just a little excited. He knew he had a heavy job on hand, and he knew also that he could have called in assistance; but for reasons of his own he had preferred to run the racket alone.

A few moments passed after the hearing of the noise, and the bedroom door opened. The detective lay low, with closed eyes.

He heard a step as a man crossed the room, knew when the villain stood beside the bed, and was conscious when the flash of light from a dark-lantern was thrown upon his face.

A moment passed—a terrible moment—although it was but a brief space of time.

A hand was laid on the detective's forehead, and in a squeaky voice, the question came:

"Who is there?"

No answer followed the query, but again the hand was laid upon the detective's face.

"Who is there?" again asked the officer, in the voice of an old woman.

"I'm here."

"Who are you and what do you want."

The latter question was spoken in a voice of rising alarm.

"Don't be frightened, old woman; we will not harm you."

"Harm me!" came the response, and the old woman sprung up in the bed.

"Hold on, missus; don't make any noise or I'll choke you!"

"Choke me?"

"Yes."

"Why will you choke me?"

"I want that money."

"What money?"

"The money in this house."

"There is no money in this house."

"Don't lie to me! There are ten thousand dollars in this house."

"You are a robber!"

"Yes, I am a robber."

"You are in the wrong house. There is no money here."

"That won't do, old woman."

"Man, whoever you are, go away; there is no money here in this house. Go while you have a chance, or I will scream for help."

"If you make the least noise I will choke you. Tell me where the money is hidden?"

"You dare not choke me!"

"Where is the money?"

"There is no money in this house."

"I know better. There are ten thousand dollars in this house; tell me where it is or I will kill you."

"If I tell you, will you go away?"

"Yes."

"And do us no harm?"

"No harm shall come to you."

"You must never betray that I told you."

"Never fear about that," laughed the robber.

"Will you let me see your face?"

"Why do you wish to see my face?"

"I want to know who you are."

"Well, you are a cool 'unt. No, no, madam; you can not see my face; and I want to know where that money is. Quick!"

"I'll tell you."

"Well, be in a hurry about it."

"Put your ear down by me; I do not want any one to know that I told you."

The man bent his head forward, and he was gone in a moment. His neck was encircled by the powerful arm of the detective. The rascal could not make an outcry. He jiggled his feet, and wriggled, but he was held in a grip of iron, and then the detective whispered in the scoundrel's ear:

"I've got you all right, my hearty."

The man's struggles, after a moment, ceased; the detective actually choked the rascal to insensibility, and then, rising from the bed, he put the handcuffs on him, tied his feet together, put a gag in his mouth, and shoved him under the bed.

An instant later, and a second robber entered, and the seeming old woman was sleeping apparently as peacefully as though all were real, and no strange tragedy were in progress.

The second robber entered the room on tip-toe, and called his companion's name.

The detective made no answer, but the sound of heavy breathing sounded through the room.

A moment passed, when in a husky whisper the robber said:

"I don't understand it; what's up? where is Sanchez?"

Again he called his pal's name, and again the only answer was the sound of heavy breathing.

"Something is wrong," said the fellow; and he advanced beside the bed, and the second time the flash from a dark-lantern was thrown upon the detective's face.

"Why, what does it mean?" scolded the robber, in an audible whisper. "Sanchez ain't in the room, and there's the old woman sleeping as peacefully as a child!"

The man turned to leave the room, when there came a stir in the bed, and a voice demanded:

"Who is there; who is in the room?"

The robber came to a stand, but made no answer.

Again there came a voice demanding:

"Who is there?"

Still the robber remained mute.

A third time the question came:

"Who is there? speak; I know some one is in this room."

The robber made a step toward the bed, muttering:

"It's no use fooling; I'll stop her noise, and have done with it!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOM HAWK was on his guard. The robber stood close beside the bed, when a shriek rang through the house; the robber started back, and the detective started up in bed, and the next instant there came a fall.

Tom Hawk's club had done its business; the robber was knocked out at the first "clip," and the darbies were placed on his wrists.

Thus the detective had two of the robbers, and he stole out from the room and moved down-stairs to capture the third man.

The latter had been placed on guard outside the house, and just at the moment the detective entered the sitting-room the fellow called through the door:

"What's up? What's the matter? have you got the boodle?"

"It's all right," answered the detective.

"Is the old woman awake?"

"Yes; come in."

The man entered the room, when Tom struck a light, and a strange sight was presented. The detective had a white nightcap on his head, with flaring frills, and he wore a long white night-gown over his ordinary attire. Indeed, he was a sight.

The robber just stood and glared in speechless amazement.

"Are you one of 'em?" demanded the seeming old woman, in a squeaky voice.

The robber was too amazed to answer, and the detective said again:

"Are you one of 'em?"

"Are you the old woman?" the robber found voice to say.

"Yes, I'm the old woman."

"Where are the fellows?"

"They're upstairs."

"Well, I'll wait for 'em outside."

"You will, eh?"

"Yes."

"No, no, old man, just throw up your hands!"

"Don't attempt to fool with me, old woman, or you'll get hurt."

"See here," said Tom, "can I have a word with you?"

"Up with your hands, old man, or there will be trouble."

The fellow made a step backward. He was preparing to resist.

"Stand!" came the command.

The fellow halted.

"Once more, and for the last time, up with your hands, or down you go!"

"Who are you?" demanded the robber.

"Don't you know me?"

"No."

"Well, it's time we were acquainted. My name is Tom Hawk, and now up with your hands, I say."

The man moved back toward the door. The detective sprang forward. The man uttered a

yell, swung round, and fell. The detective was upon him, and the darbies were on his wrists in a second.

"It's all right now," said our hero; and he spoke truly. He had made a neat job of it, and had captured all three of the robbers. The last fellow was not hurt, the ball had clipped close to his temple, merely barked him, and had knocked him over; but practically he was unhurt.

The detective removed his disguise and ascended the stairs, and one after the other dragged the other two fellows down to the dining-room, where he bound the whole three securely, and started off and aroused the town constable, whom he knew personally, and ere daylight the three robbers were safely lodged in the county jail.

With the morning Miss Knight and her aunt returned; and meantime the news of the attempted robbery and the adroit capture had spread abroad, and the people came from all quarters to view the scene of the adventure.

The constable was on guard, and no one was permitted to enter the house, where our hero held a long consultation with Miss Knight and her aunt.

The last words of our hero were:

"You are safe now; you need not fear a second attempt. I owe you many thanks for your courage in permitting me to carry out my scheme, and arrest the rascals."

"And what do we owe you, sir?" demanded the younger woman.

"Nothing. I have but done my duty."

"We owe our lives to you. Those wretches, those monsters, would have murdered us!"

"Well, it's all right now."

"We will see you again, sir?"

"Yes; some day. But at present I must be up and doing."

The detective returned to the house where he lodged. Returned as the invalid, and successfully concealed his identity, and although every one was talking about Tom Hawk, no one knew that the pleasant gentleman who was seen about was the great detective.

In the evening our hero went to the house where the robbers were wont to congregate, once more. He was under disguise. He found the loungers round Byron's place holding an animated discussion. Matters were mixed; the regular loungers had suddenly awakened to the idea that their resort had for some days been the resort of thieves, and that was the question they were discussing when our hero entered.

Tom was gotten up as a green Dutchman, and as the place was a public resort, no one paid any attention to him, and he was permitted to sit and sip his beer without attracting any unusual attention.

He had been an hour in the place when a country carryall stopped in front of the hostelry, and four men alighted and entered the bar-room. The men appeared to be a jolly lot of young countrymen on a spree; but the detective was not long in discerning that they were in disguise, and he lay around watching for clews.

One of the men at length left the bar-room, and walked out toward the barn. The detective watched an opportunity, and slipped out also, and he soon got in position from whence he could have an eye to all that might pass inside the stable.

A few moments passed, and the proprietor of the resort straggled out to the barn. That seeming half-drunken, jolly countryman was suddenly transformed into a sober, keen man of business.

"Say, Byron," said the man, "what's wrong around here?"

"I don't understand you," said Byron.

"You don't understand me, eh? Well, I'll speak plainer. Five of the gang are in jail."

"That's so."

"And those men were 'nipped' when running out schemes that had been arranged in your house."

"That's so."

"Certainly it's so, and now what does it mean?"

"I don't know what it means."

"Do you think anything would help your memory, my friend?"

The owner of the hostelry uttered a low cry and answered:

"You men do not suspect me?"

"Well, somebody must be suspected."

"Tom Hawk's in the neighborhood."

"That's it; and who gives Night-Hawk his information?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BYRON did not make an immediate reply to the dark insinuation of his companion in the barn, and the latter said:

"Byron, old man, Night-Hawk must get his information from some one."

"Do you suspect me?"

"Well, we can't tell. It's very strange that two expeditions organized in your house should result in such dire disaster. Night Hawk had everything dead to rights on our boys—knew in advance every move they were to make, laid his plans accordingly, and, as I said, the result is, five of our best men are 'nipped,' and the chances are that they will all be fixed for the next ten or twenty years."

"This thing has bothered me."

"Well, I should say it ought to bother you; it looks bad."

"Has any one dared suggest that I am not straight?"

"Well, yes."

"Who is the man?"

"It would be hard to name any particular man, as quite a number are of the opinion that you are making money."

"It's false."

"Then you must clear yourself. I'll tell you a conversation that I overheard. Now, Byron, you know I am your friend, and you can just believe what I say. Two of the lads were talking together over the mystery, when one of them said: 'Do you want to stop the give-away business?' 'Yes,' answered the other, when the first speaker exclaimed: 'Put a seal on Byron, and there'll be no give-aways.'"

"Who was the man?"

"I can not tell you, but there is an unusual sentiment among the boys that all is not right."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"Clear yourself."

"How can I?"

"Are you innocent?"

"I am."

"Then you are as much interested as any of us in discovering who it is that has been giving things away."

"I am."

"You ought to be able to aid us."

"In what manner?"

"There are a great many steady visitors to your house?"

"Yes."

"Can you suspect any of them?"

"No, not a man."

"Do you have any occasional visitors?"

"Ah! now you are getting down to it. I've noticed one thing."

"Give it to us."

"I observed that every time the lads are 'quickered on' that there has been a stranger in my house the night before."

"What sort of a looking man is this stranger?"

"Ah, there's the mystery!—it's always a different-looking man."

"Ah, I see! You think it's some one 'under cover'?"

"That's the idea that has been running through my brain."

"And when does this stranger come?"

"He always appears to be around just those nights when something new is on hand."

"Is he here to-night?"

"Well, strange as it may appear, there is a man hanging around the bar-room whom I never saw there before."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"He looks like a green Dutchman."

"Have you heard him speak?"

"Yes, when he called for a beer."

"And how does he talk?"

"All right."

"But you've an idea concerning him?"

"No idea only that he is a stranger."

"Do you think there is a possibility that he is a spy?"

"Can't tell."

"There is one thing I'm to tell you, Byron, we are going to the bottom of this thing."

"I want you to do so."

"And when we find the man we will only have one job on hand."

"I am at your service."

"The man who is against us must get out. The gang have sworn it."

"I am willing to have all my acts investigated; but to me it does appear that it is a traitor."

"What makes you think so?"

"The party gives the thing so dead away."

Now, listen, last night's scheme was a 'jump er.' The lads got together and arranged it within the hour when they set to carry out the game."

"I know that."

"And Night-Hawk was ahead of them at the cottage; had all the points."

"Yes, and I was told to-day in the county jail that you were the only man to whom they opened up their scheme."

"I believe that, and it is the very fact that worries me."

"It ought to worry you, the matter has a bad look."

"I have been thinking the matter over, and that is where I am getting down to the facts."

"Let's have 'em."

"A stranger was in my house last night."

"Ah, how's that? What sort of a looking man?"

"As innocent a looking chap as ever crossed my threshold."

"How long did he remain?"

"Well, I missed him after the men had gone out to hold a little consultation."

"And did he turn up again?"

"No."

"This is a pretty nice thing you're giving me, Byron."

"It's the truth."

"Well, I've one word to say; don't give the tale to any one else."

"Why not?"

"It's too fresh."

"And you doubt me?"

"No, I do not doubt; I've reason to believe you are a straight man. I am your friend; I've stood in for you, or you would at this moment be a marked man, as the lads were dead set to lay you out."

"If they harm me they harm an innocent man."

"That stranger, have you seen him since?"

"No."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"No."

"Not the night the attack was made on the Castle?"

"There was a stranger in my house two or three nights in succession, just previous to that little racket."

"And he has not shown up since Cheesy and Snagsy were captured?"

"He has not."

"And the only stranger in your house to-night is the German?"

"Yes."

"You never saw him before?"

"Never."

"All right; we'll work a game. We will return to the bar-room, you and I; then some of the lads and I will hold a little whisper, and afterward we will slip out for a consultation. Meantime, you keep your eye on Dutchy, and if he slips out after us, you come and let me know."

"A good scheme," said Byron.

"It must be worked very slow, you know. No 'give-away.'"

"You can depend upon me."

"Mind you, old man, we must get at the bottom of this thing, or I'd not give a rush for your chance; the lads are mad."

"I am willing to stand trial."

"They will not wait for a trial; they are, in fact, trying you now."

"All right; we will try the game on the Dutchman."

A few moments later Byron and the man whom he had met in the barn returned to the bar-room, and they found the Dutchman smoking his pipe as peacefully as a Comanche warrior after a long chase.

Meantime the pretended Dutchman was keeping up a lively thinking. He realized that he had big game to chase.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOOKING like a German, but thinking in good English, the stranger in Byron's place said:

"Let me capture that fellow with the evidence against him and I reckon the gang will be a tradition in this section of the country!"

Meantime Tom Hawk puffed away peacefully at his pipe.

The man who had been in the barn was approached, a few moments after his return to the bar-room, by one of his companions who gave him a "tip." The detective saw the movement, and he was uneasy as he recognized that the "tip" was a genuine signal, not a part of

the scheme that had been arranged by the two men in the barn. He sat still, however, and let his eyes do duty.

The two men adjourned to one corner of the room, when the man who gave the signal demanded of the captain:

"Where were you?"

"When?"

"A few moments ago."

"Out in the barn."

"What were you doing there?"

"Asking a few questions of Byron."

"Did you see any one around?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"A man left the room just after you did and he appeared just ahead of you."

"Aha! the Dutchman?"

"Yes."

"Stanley, we are watching that fellow."

"Have you noticed anything queer about him?"

"No; have you?"

"I should smile."

"What's the tip?"

"The man is under cover."

"Aha! is that so?"

"Yes."

"You have been watching him?"

"I have."

"And what do you make out?"

"He's watching, too."

"Watching who?"

"Watching everything that is passing around here."

"You speak German?"

"I do, and that's how I tumbled to him. I heard him call for a beer, and I at once tumbled to the fact that his Dutch-English was not genuine."

"Who can it be?"

"That we are to find out, but one thing is certain—he is under cover."

"We can set a trap for him."

"How?"

"You and I will go out."

"Well?"

"He may follow us."

"Yes?"

"We will know it."

"Yes."

"All right; we will know what to do."

"Catch him?"

"As sure as your name is Chris."

"That scheme suits me."

"Well, come."

The two men rose and stepped over to the bar, held a few minutes' whispered conversation with Byron, and then both stole from the house together.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed, and the two men returned; the Dutchman sat peacefully smoking his pipe. He had not left his seat.

The schemers were foiled.

"Captain, he's tumbled."

"No."

"Then why didn't he come out?"

"That we are to learn; we must work in with him."

"How shall we do it?"

"Ask him to drink."

"Well?"

"Get him up to our room."

"All right."

"You can talk to him in German."

"A good scheme."

A few moments passed; the captain asked all hands in the place to have a drink. There were only one or two of the usual loungers around.

The German did not respond to the invitation, and the captain went over and gave him an especial invite to take a drink. The man accepted the invitation.

"You're a stranger around here?" said the captain.

"Ya-a-s."

"Looking for work?"

"Ya-a-s."

"Are you a farmer?"

"Yes," spoken with the prolonged drawl.

"I want a man."

"I vos looking for a blacc."

"If you are a good man I might take you on with me."

"I vos glad oof you hire me."

"You can come up to my room pretty soon, and I will talk the matter over."

"You lif here?"

"I will remain here to-night."

"Vere vos your house?"

"Ten miles from here."

"You vos keep horses?"

"Yes."

"I vos a goot horse-doctor."

"So much the better."

The men remained for fully an hour in the bar-room. The captain was waiting for the usual loungers to go off about their business.

At length the place was all deserted save by the captain and Chris; the two other pals of the captain had mysteriously disappeared.

"Come up to my room," said the captain.

"All right; I go mit you."

The captain led the pretended German to a room over the bar-room, and, a few minutes later, was joined by Chris; the latter at once addressed the detective in German, and received a prompt reply.

The man looked puzzled, and he and the captain exchanged glances—indeed, Chris passed a certain signal over to his leader, and the latter commenced asking the German a number of questions pertinent to farm-work, and, after a time, receiving a signal from Chris, he said:

"I will talk to you further in the morning."

"I will not stay here to-night."

"Oh! you will not stay here?"

"No."

"You can come here and meet me in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

The German left the room and returned to the bar-room, when the captain said:

"He ain't our man, eh?"

"Bah, you didn't take my call."

"What do you mean?"

"That fellow is—"

"Who?"

"Tom Hawk, as sure as your name is Stanley."

"Tom Hawk?" ejaculated the captain.

"Yes, Tom Hawk."

"Why didn't you signal?"

"You didn't want to be killed, did you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you are dull."

"How so?"

"You and I tackle that man alone in this room?"

"Our friends were not far off."

"But he would have settled us before our friends got here. Listen, that man would never have come to this room unless he had known that he was all right."

"How, all right?"

"He was ready for you and me, you can bet your bottom dollar. He knows we have dropped to him."

"What makes you think so?"

"The fact that he did not follow us out speaks volumes; it tells us he had tumbled to our game."

"And now, what shall we do?"

"We must catch him napping!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"WELL, it's easy enough to say we'll catch him; but when will we have a better chance than we had here?"

"It was dead against us here."

"When will we have a better chance?"

"When we take him unaware, and we can not attempt it otherwise."

The two men returned to the bar-room, but the German had disappeared.

"Do you think he will meet me here to-morrow?" asked the captain.

"We will not wait to learn."

"What is your game?"

"I will tell you what my plan is, and you can act or not, as you choose."

"State your plan."

"It can be stated in a few words."

"State it, I say."

"There are three of us."

"Yes."

"We are well armed."

"Well armed—yes."

"It is after midnight."

"All right."

"The road is a lonely one."

"Ah! I see."

"Follow him."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"And catch him in the darkness?"

"Yes."

"It's a 'go'!"

The third man was summoned, and a consultation was held with Byron, who stated that the German had not been gone five minutes.

The captain said:
 "There's but one road to the village?"
 "But one route from here to the main road, but after you pass a few hundred yards you come to a point; one road runs down by the river, the other goes direct to the village. The direct road is the shortest, but it is possible your man may go by the river."
 "Have you a rifle, Byron?"
 The tavern-keeper did not make an immediate reply.
 "What's the matter?"
 "If anything should happen the gun might be traced to me."
 "The gun shall be returned."
 "Yes, but the bullet may be fitted to it here; no, no, that will not do!"
 One of the men said:
 "We do not want your rifle, it would be of no use to-night."
 "So be it!" responded the captain, and the three men started out in the darkness.
 In about an hour the men returned. Byron sat in the bar-room waiting for them; the man's face was pale, his eyes glared, and he was evidently extremely nervous, and, when the fellows re-entered his place, he demanded in a tremulous tone:
 "Did you overtake him?"
 "No."
 "Did you see him at all?"
 "No, and we couldn't find even a footprint, and there is a heavy dew and tracks would be easily discernible."
 "I didn't think you would find him. I tell you, boys, Night-Hawk is the devil himself!"
 "He is raising the devil with us."
 "Take my advice and get away from this section of country for a season."
 "Permit ourselves to be chased out by one man?"
 "Yes; better than to have all hands captured and sent up."
 "This advice don't come well from you, Byron, old man!"
 "Why not?"
 "It looks bad. Night-Hawk got his information here!"
 "I could not help that. I never recognized the man."
 "But it looks bad for your advice to come on top of that fact."
 "I've nothing more to say."
 "But we have something to say. We propose to hold you responsible."
 "You threaten me?"
 "Yes."
 "Be careful! You fellows know I've never made a dollar out of you except in my bar business. I never asked your confidence, but I've never betrayed it; still, I do not mean to be bulldozed."
 "You ain't straight."
 "I'm not one of your gang."
 "That don't make any difference, old man; your time has come!"
 "What do you mean?"
 "You are the man who has been giving information against us."
 "It's false!"
 "That man never could have 'got on to' everything unless he had received your help; and now you confess all you know, or to-night is your last on earth!"
 The man spoke in a fierce, meaning tone.
 "Do you mean what you say?"
 "Yes, I do."
 "Listen to me. I am an innocent man, and I have furnished you all the information I possess. This thing has been no gain to me, and I would rather you fellows had not come here."
 "That's won't do; own up."
 "I've nothing to own up."
 "Yes, you have."
 "Tell me what I've to own up?"
 "Where is the detective?"
 "Where is the detective?"
 "Yes."
 "How do I know?"
 "You do know. He never left this house. There is but one chance for you to save your life: we'll down you if we never make another stroke, so own up and save your life."
 "The detective is not here."
 "He never left this house."
 "Then search it: if you find him here I've nothing to say."
 "You have things fixed, no doubt, and we will not find him without your aid."
 "I can not aid you, for I know nothing about it. I do not even know that the man who was here is the detective."

"We know."
 "And you must find him. I know nothing about him. I never exchanged a word with him knowingly in my life."
 "What do you say, boys?" demanded the captain, turning toward the other two men.
 "Do you mean mischief?" he asked, in a husky voice.
 "Unless you confess, yes."
 "I've nothing to confess."
 The men moved toward him, when the owner of the place leaped back behind his bar, and exclaimed:
 "Now, come on!"
 The men had not expected resistance, and, besides, they had not really intended to kill him; they suspected him, and were seeking to scare him into a confession.
 A rather dramatic scene was presented.
 "I am ready for you fellows; come on!" said Byron.
 The men all laughed.
 "We did not mean you any harm, old man."
 "You didn't, eh? Well, I've no thanks for you. And now let me tell you something: you men came here and accused me of treachery; if I had been treacherous, I would have made a big stake. I've certain information you fellows don't dream of, and I could have used it had I been against you."
 "You have certain information?"
 "Yes, I have."
 "What information have you?"
 "I know all about the machine-shop, and I've all the points dead to rights."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE was a listener to the whole of the above conversation.
 Tom Hawk, indeed, had not left the place. He had passed from the house, but had taken advantage of the dilapidated condition of the building to secure a hiding-place.
 The detective calculated that there would be an exchange of confidences, not after the manner as subsequently transpired, but he was looking for information, and he was getting it. The detective had set out not only to chase off the gang but to secure them, and at the moment when the scene we have described was transpiring, he was right under the floor of the room where it occurred. He had crawled under, where only dogs and cats had preceded him, at the risk of being suffocated with foul odors, but it was a matter of business, and he took the risks, and also the still greater risk of being discovered, and the latter meant death, as he would most certainly have been at the mercy of the robbers.
 When Byron made his startling declaration the three robbers recoiled in astonishment, and later on exchanged amazed glances.
 "Yes," said the tavern-keeper, "I could have led Night-Hawk straight to your little laboratory while all hands were at work."
 "Byron, you lie."
 "No, I don't lie!"
 "What do you know?"
 "The whole business."
 "There's nothing to know."
 "There ain't, eh? Well, I've got it good that you are only raiding to raise funds to finish for a flood, and I know where all your machinery is; I've got the whole thing down fine."
 "You have?"
 "Yes, I have."
 "Where is this fancy shop you are speaking of, old man?"
 "I know where it is, safe enough."
 "We give you permission to tell all you know."
 "Will you?"
 "Yes."
 The man uttered some statements in a hurried manner, but he located the machine-shop he had been talking about and named a great number of the men who were engaged in the underground enterprise.
 The three men were astounded; the gang had a regular organization; men were admitted only after the swearing of the most fearful oaths and the passing through of the most terrible ordeals, and here was a man who had never been sworn, who had never passed through one of the ordeals, who had, as the slang goes, the "whole business."
 "You see I've got it all good."
 So had our hero hiding under the bar-room got it all good, and he had suspected something

of the kind, and it was to be the crowning triumph of his professional career to "catch on" to the secret.
 "Old man, you have signed your own death-warrant!" said the captain in a solemn voice; "you don't know what you have said!"
 "I am not bound by an oath. I am only proving that I have not been giving anything away."
 "There is but one way for you to save your life."
 "My life is in no danger."
 "Twenty men are sworn to down you, and you can not escape unless you—"
 The man hesitated.
 "Unless I do what?"
 "Name the man who betrayed all the facts to you."
 "It was not a man who betrayed the facts to me."
 "It could not have been a woman, for no woman had them."
 "It was not a woman."
 "Who was it?"
 "That's my secret."
 "And that secret will cost you your life!"
 "Don't threaten me. I am a different man from what I've been rated by you fellows. I owe you nothing."
 The four men stood facing each other, presenting a most striking tableau, when a really startling incident occurred.
 A smothered cough was heard; it was not uttered by any one in the room, and yet it sounded as though the cough had been right in their midst.
 The men gazed into each other's faces, and then fierce glances were lowered upon Byron, and the captain, in a husky voice, demanded:
 "Will you deny it now? Where is he?"
 "I do not know anything more about it than you do."
 "Old man, just one word in your ear. Nothing on earth can save you unless you squeal."
 "I've nothing to say."
 "You can save yourself."
 "I've nothing to say."
 The three robbers were beaten; they dared not make an assault upon the tavern-keeper at that moment. The mysterious cough had come as a warning to them. They were fully convinced that Byron and the detective were in with each other, and that the latter was set to give them dead away. They were dead set back.
 The truth was, however, that Byron was as much alarmed by hearing the mysterious cough as were the men, and after a moment he said, in a low whisper:
 "You men are going dead against yourselves."
 "How so?"
 "By suspecting me."
 "We have the thing dead on you."
 "Some one has been listening to our talk."
 "Certainly; you knew that."
 "I swear I did not!"
 "What's your game now?"
 "My game is to save you fellows."
 "Save us, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "How?"
 "I am with you to find out who is sneaking around here."
 "Do you mean what you say?"
 "I do, as I live!"
 "Bah! it's some 'snap' you want to get us into, old man."
 "As I live, no!"
 "What do you suspect?"
 The man spoke very low; indeed, his communication was more pantomime than utterance.
 The captain and his men approached closer to him, when he raised his pistols and said:
 "No, no; don't come close; you can't heel me."
 "What is it you want?"
 "I want you men to swear I'm innocent."
 "And then—"
 "And I will let you into a suspicion."
 "We swear."
 "Give me your weapons."
 "Hello! that's your game, eh?"
 "In your own interests."
 "It won't work!"
 "Remember, then, it is not my fault if your 'gig' goes up."
 "What's your game?"
 "Only to see that you do not back-cap me, and then I'm with you!"
 One of the men laid his weapon on the bar, and the others followed this example.

"Come close," whispered Byron. The men approached closer to him. The detective is somewhere around. "You know it?" "No; I only suspect it." "Where is he?" "I have an idea." "Speak." "If we find him?" "We will fix him!" "I will aid you! Lay low, and the man is in our hands!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE faces of the three men were ghastly; they had a big job on hand, but it was more than ever necessary that the detective should be silenced.

The men huddled together, and Byron said: "If he is near, and has been listening, he has the 'whole business,' knows where the machine shop is located, and just what the racket is clean through!"

The captain of the men fully realized the significance of what was said, and he trembled, and on the other hand Byron trembled. He knew that should the place be "pulled," his life was not worth a "rap," as he would be accused of having given the thing away, and there were men connected with the enterprise who were the most desperate criminals in the land.

An Italian and a Frenchman were at the head of the base metal coinage movement. They were carrying out an extensive game.

It will be remembered that many times, when burglars were arrested or interrupted in their work, tools of the best manufacture have been frequently discovered, and the detectives were, and have been, always at fault as to where such fine steel work was manufactured, and as the matter stood, the listening detective rejoiced that he had tumbled to the "burrow."

The Italian and the Frenchman were expert machinists and die-sinkers, and, as innocent emigrants, had opened an ordinary blacksmith and tool shop, and they did a legitimate business mending plows and general farm utensils; but back of this legitimate business the scoundrels were members of an organized secret gang, and in an underground shop, ingeniously constructed, they worked nights, and manufactured all the fine kits of burglars' tools used by the most expert cracksmen in the country. And, besides, they were, as disclosed by Byron, at work, making the proper dies and machinery for running off base-metal coins, and also counterfeit notes. The whole thing was one of the most comprehensive schemes of plunder ever organized.

The men needed capital, and the burglaries that were being carried on were for the purpose of supplying the money for the purchase of stock and other needful appurtenances of the underground machine shop.

The detective, from what he had overheard, together with information already in his possession, was able to establish the above facts, and he consequently felt the importance of his discoveries, the necessity for moving slowly and surely.

On the other hand, the three men who had forced the statement from Byron more fully realized the importance of catching the detective; were he to escape and succeed in trailing to their "burrow," the whole fraternity would be ruined, as the result of their accumulations for over a year had been thrown into a common "boodle" for the support of the machine-shop; their "swag" had been converted into cash and invested so as to facilitate the grand scheme of plunder they had on hand.

In answer to Byron's declaration the captain said:

"You gave this thing away."
"I call your friends, here, to witness that you compelled me to make a statement."
"You're a cunning man, Byron; you are working to cover your tracks."
An angry look shot into the tavern-keeper's eyes, and he said:
"Be careful, old man; I can't take too much."

"You can prove your innocence?"
"I've nothing to prove."
"As the matter stands, the gang will hold you responsible."
"I've nothing to do with the gang. It's only because I'm a square man that I haven't made a big stake."
"It looks dead against you."

"All right; if that's the way you feel, I'm out of the thing, and will look to take care of myself."

One of the other men said:
"Captain, you're pressing this thing too far."

"Yes; you are pressing it too far."
"You can show your loyalty," said the captain.

"I owe nothing to the gang."
"You can show your friendship."
"I'm willing to do that."

"You suspect the presence of the detective?"
"Yes, if he has not got away."

"Aid us to catch him, and we will look upon you as our best friend."

"I am willing to aid you, but we must go slow and sure."

"We are under your orders, and if you attempt any game you are a dead man."

"Then we can't work."
"Why not?"

"I must have your confidence."
"You have it."

"Then take back your words."
"Consider them unsaid."

"I have an idea."
"What is your idea?"

"We must lead into a 'throw-off.' If there is a listener, we have let out a note of warning."

"What will you have us do?"
"You lads must threaten me—make an attack on me in words. Let it come as though we had a fresh outbreak after this whispered talk we have just had."

"I see your game."

Our readers must remember that the whispered talk took place in a rapid manner, and that the men really were not whispering together more than three minutes at most, and, acting under Byron's suggestions, the captain said:

"Old man, it's no use fooling; your explanation is satisfactory. Hawk has escaped us, and you gave him the 'tip'!"

"It's false!"

While talking, Byron produced a slate and commenced writing upon it. He was just jotting down his suspicions and his instructions as to how the men were to operate. Meantime the conversation continued, and the semi-tragic farce made it appear as though the affair would end in a tragedy indeed.

"It's easy for you to say it's false; but, see here, how is it he slipped off so quickly, just after we had tumbled to his identity?"

"That is a matter I can not explain."

"Until you do explain, it will stand that you are in with him."

"I'll stand no more of this!" exclaimed Byron; "I'm not in with you, lads. I'm under no obligation to you, and I'll take no blame."

"You will take what we give you, and if you don't open up I'll give you the contents of this!"

"Hold!" cried Byron.

"Then open up."

"I swear I know nothing about the man who was here. I did not exchange a word with him, and when he went away it was at his own will."

"It's the last call, old man; you can't fool us!"

"I've no idea to fool, I say; and it's a cruel thing for my life to be threatened in a matter that does not concern me."

"Open up."

"Hold! I say,"

"Open up!" came the command in a louder and fiercer tone.

"I swear I do not know anything about the man, only that he went away."

While Byron was talking he passed around the slate bearing his instructions.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE slate informed the men that the cough had come from under the bar-room, and also stated that they were to steal out one at a time, and that a lantern was to be suddenly thrust under the flooring.

The men understood the instructions, and the programme was carried out; one of the men at a signal slipped away, and his instructions were "to shout if he saw any one." A moment later

a second man slipped out, and lastly Byron and the captain passed out together.

The tavern-keeper had passed his repeating rifle over to the captain, and the men calculated that if the detective was really there his moments were numbered.

Byron carried the lantern, and on tip-toe the men approached the opening under the flooring, and held a whispered consultation.

"Have you seen any one?" asked the captain.

"No."

"Have you heard any one move?"

"No."

Byron slipped the lid of a masked lantern, and dropping upon his hands and knees, shoved the lamp under the flooring; the captain knelt beside him on one side with the cocked rifle in his hand, and the other two robbers were on the other side with cocked revolvers.

As the light from the unmasked lantern shot through the gloom under the building, a man's head was revealed, and the tavern-keeper said, in a husky whisper:

"There he is!"

The captain had seen the hat, and the outline of a human form extended beyond it.

For a few moments there was music in the air. The man under the building made no response.

The scoundrels congratulated themselves on their success.

For a good five minutes not a word was spoken, and they held the lantern so that its light was thrown directly upon the sleeping form, but not a muscle moved.

Finally, the captain said:

"Who will go in and see what there is under there?"

The faces of the men were pale and their voices subdued.

Not one of them volunteered to go under the building.

"Who will go?" repeated the captain.

Still there came no response.

At length he said:

"I will go myself."

The captain took the masked lantern from the hands of the tavern-keeper, and crawled in.

A moment of breathless silence and interest followed, broken only by a curse.

The captain came forth from under the flooring, bearing with him a hat which had been perforated with bullets, and the coat the Dutchman had worn.

The men realized the trick that had been played upon them, and they, too, joined in the uttering of bitter imprecations.

"It's not my fault," said Byron. "He was there, and I did all I could to aid you fellows in getting the best of him."

Indeed, the detective had been there, but he was not the man to be caught "napping." Tom Hawk was the king of strategists. In changing his position under the flooring, he had shook down a nest of cobwebs, and the dust getting into his eyes, nose, and throat, compelled him to cough, though his life depended upon the effort, and he observed the sudden lull in the conversation of the men overhead.

At once he discerned that he had been discovered, and he made up his mind that it was time to leave. He did not mean to be caught like a bear in a spring-trap, and at the same time he made up his mind to have a little sport, and he arranged his hat and coat so it would appear that a man was stretched out under the flooring; and it was at the empty hat the men had been blazing away.

When the burglars realized the trick that had been played upon them, Byron was loud in his declarations of innocence.

The men adjourned to the bar-room, and one of them asked:

"What shall we do now?"

"Boys, this is bad business!"

While the men were talking a dark figure was a second time crawling under the flooring, and the daring detective, despite all that had occurred, took the desperate chances of once more listening to their talk.

"Yes, it is bad business; that man has all the points on us now. He must have overheard every word that passed."

He certainly did.

"Byron, we will be compelled to trust you."

"Certainly, you can trust me. I have shown myself your friend."

"That man will come here again."

"He will, but under another disguise."

"All right! We will put up a job on him"

with your help, and if you stand to us you will come in for a big rake when the 'flood' has been let out."

"What's your game?"

"When he comes here, you must call off two men who will be here for the purpose; the detective will follow to take in your plans. You must give him a chance to do so, and in his hearing you must arrange for a big robbery scheme, and then we will do the rest."

"I see your game; it's a decoy!"

"Yes."

"All right, I'm in with you."

"And, old man, listen! it's death for you to fail us!"

"You can depend upon me."

The three men a few moments later entered their wagon, which had been standing under the shed all the hours they had been there, and the party drove away. Had the rascals looked under the building they would have seen their man; but after all, it might have proved a fatal look for each one in succession, as the detective held two cocked revolvers in his hands, and he was a dead shot.

A few moments after the three robbers had driven away, Tom Hawk crawled out from his hiding-place, and putting on the riddled hat and coat which the men had tossed outside, he entered the bar-room just as Byron was closing up for the night, although it was far into the morning.

As the detective entered, the door, the tavern-keeper uttered a cry of alarm, and stood with starting eyes like one who sees a ghost.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE detective with the riddled hat upon his head and the identical coat that had gone through the fusillade, staggered into the room and exclaimed:

"Byron, mine friend! hello, old fellow, how you vos, eh?"

As intimated, the tavern-keeper gazed as though his glance were fixed upon an apparition direct from the grave. He made no answer to the detective's salutation.

"Vell, vy don't you speak mit a feller? Hello! how you vos?"

"Where did you come from?" demanded Byron.

"Vell, I tole you. I vos taking a sleep under your house. I vos not ready dot I pay money for a bed, and I goes down under dere and sleeps mit minself, and, by shimmetta! I vos vakened up mit a noise like guns, and I shust crawls out mit mine coat and hat and vails, and by shimmetta! I vos right; dey vos having fun shooting at mine coat and hat; but I vos not dere, so I vos shoost crawl oudt mit minself and now, oldt feller, vot vos it all means?"

The tavern-keeper was trembling like an aspen leaf; the man realized that he was standing face to face with the Black Douglas of that region—the wonderful Tom Hawk, the terror of criminals from Yonkers to Albany. Indeed, the fellow felt as though he had really come to final judgment.

"Who are you?" demanded Byron.

"Hello! you vos not know me?"

"No; and I want you clear out! My house is closed!"

"Your house vos closed?"

"Yes."

"Vell; I tolt you vos shust open mit de next day's business."

"It's no use disguising matters," said the tavern-keeper suddenly. "I don't want you here. I don't know you, and you have nearly cost me my life."

The detective at once dropped his disguised tone, and answered:

"Byron, you are in a bad scrape."

"How?"

"Between me and the villains you are in with you stand a bad chance."

"I am in with no one."

"I overheard your little conversation."

Byron was a quick-witted fellow, and a man of considerable nerve, and he answered:

"I knew you were around, and I did all I could for you."

"Did you?"

"I did, certainly. You know I let you into their biggest secret, and at the same time I was trying to save myself from being hacked to pieces."

"You are a shrewd fellow."

"An honest man has to be shrewd when he gets caught in such a scrape as I am in at this moment!"

"Yes, you are in a bad scrape."

"And you got me in it, and I've had nothing to do with either game."

"You knew I was under the floor?"

"Yes."

"And you led those fellows to find me?"

"I was only playing a game. I knew you would not be there when we got there; if you were, it would be your own fault, as I gave you plenty of time to get away before I let the secret out."

"And you want me to believe that you were acting in my interest?"

"Yes."

"You will have to prove it, old man."

"How can I prove it? Can you not see the facts as they are?"

"You can prove it."

"How?"

"Go in with me now."

"I can not."

"Why not?"

"I am not ready to throw my life away."

"Those fellows will down you any way, after they are done with you."

"I don't propose to have anything to do with them."

"Bah! you can't work that game. If you do not aid them in downing me, they will down you; and, old man, they can not down me. I've got things dead on them, and your only safety is to fall in with me."

"And put a mortgage on my life forever?"

"Hardly."

"These men will never forgive me."

"They will never know it."

"Let me stand off. You say you have all the points?"

"Yes; up to your last little arrangement."

"What is our last little arrangement?"

"To catch me in a trap. I will not be caught."

"Then how can I help you?"

"There is a robbery game on foot."

"You say you have all the points?"

"Not the particulars."

"I dare not tell you anything."

"Do you want me against you?"

"No."

"Then open up."

"Later on; I must wait."

"Wait for what?"

"To see what those fellows will do after what has just occurred."

"Will you give me all the 'points' afterward?"

"Yes."

"Listen to me. I will be there to-morrow night."

"All right."

"You will know me; I will come in this shape."

The detective described just how he would appear.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Carry out your schedule as Stanley ordered you to do."

"I'm getting myself in a mess."

"No; you are getting out of a mess; stand to me, and I will guarantee no harm shall come to you."

"I will think the matter over."

"Where is Pell?"

"I have not seen him lately."

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothing, only that he is one of the gang."

"Did the fellow ever take you into his confidence?"

"No."

"Never laid claim to any big relationship?"

"Not to me."

"Is he in with the machine-shop gang?"

"I think he is."

"When did you see him last?"

"I've not seen him for a couple of days."

"Do you expect to see him?"

"He may turn up."

"Is he in the racket the gang has on hand?"

"He was to have been in it."

"What is the 'lay'?"

"I will not tell you now."

"You want to get away from this part of the country?"

"I can't leave my business."

"But, if you made a big stake?"

"Then I might talk."

"All right, old man. To-morrow night will tell the tale for you, and I'll know which way you play."

"I'll not play against you; but I must study my steps."

"That's all right; good-night."

Upon the day following the incidents we

have described the detective made certain arrangements. He was laying plans for a grand haul and a big "close in." He only had a few more "points" to "catch on to," when he would be ready to strike a tremendous blow on the side of order and safety; the night that followed was destined to be fraught with thrilling adventures.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT the appointed hour, as arranged with Byron, a man dressed exactly as the detective had described reached the tavern.

The disguise was an excellent one, and Byron admitted that, had he not been previously apprised, he would have been deceived.

As the evening wore on a singular incident occurred; more strangers arrived at different periods than had ever been in the house before.

The tavern-keeper became bewildered, although he had a suspicion on which he based an explanation, and his suspicion was that all the new-comers were members of the gang. Stanley had said two or three men would be there, but it appeared as though he had sent a dozen, and the tavern-keeper made up his mind that a tragedy would wind up the game.

One of the strangers at length got an opportunity and made himself known by passing the prearranged signal.

"How many of you are here?" demanded Byron.

"Two or three of us."

"No more?"

"Well, there may be more."

"Our men, most likely."

"So I thought."

"You are only to act with three of us."

"Designate the three."

The man managed, when an opportunity offered, to point out his two immediate companions.

"Is he here?" demanded the member of the gang.

"He may be."

"Are you not sure?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He is under cover, and there are so many strangers here to-night I will have to feel for him."

"No need."

"Why not?"

"When we carry out the captain's orders he will uncover himself."

"What is the game?"

"It was explained to you."

"But the programme must have been changed."

"What makes you think so?"

"The fact that there are so many men here."

"They are here to guard against any surprise."

"And you mean to carry out the regular programme?"

"Yes."

"No attack will be made here to-night?"

"That depends."

"If that is the game, I must know it."

"It is not the game; we are only ready for all contingencies."

"We must go slow."

"Why?"

"We will give the game away; we are playing against the keenest man in America!"

"All right, we have plenty of time, and we are under your orders."

"Only for timely information."

"That's the racket."

"Off! Do not stand and talk to me now; we will run together again."

The man drew away.

The tavern-keeper was in trouble. It would have suited him to have had the detective downed, but there was a chance that, despite their keen game, the detective might get the best of the play, and then it would go hard with Monsieur Byron. It was his game, to use a common expression, to make himself "solid" with both sides, and he watched his opportunity and sent over a "tip" to the officer.

A few moments later, Byron slid out from the room, and, some five minutes later, Tom Hawk "fitted" also, and he met the tavern-keeper in the hall-way of the dwelling part of the house.

"You wanted me?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the play?"

"The house is full of strangers."

"So I see. Who are they?"

"Members of the gang."
 "They have changed the programme?"
 "No."
 "Then what is the meaning of the presence of so many of them?"
 "I have sounded, and they tell me it is to guard against contingencies."
 "Ah! that's it, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "It means mischief?"
 "Honestly, that's my idea."
 "And what would you suggest, Byron?"
 "You had better 'skip.'"
 "That is your advice?"
 "Yes."
 "But I do not know how to 'skip.' I am here on business."
 "I have warned you."
 "All right."
 "What more can I do?"
 "No more."
 "What will you do?"
 "Proceed with the game."
 "You will remain against all the odds?"
 "Yes."
 "And shall I carry out the original programme?"
 "Yes."
 "All right; it's as you say. I am to be held blameless as going against you, no matter what happens."
 "If you carry yourself straight, and do not give me any false information."
 "I am giving you everything 'straight.'"
 "I shall know."
 "You know, now, I'm telling you there are seven or eight, possibly ten or twelve of the gang in the house, and that looks to me as though they intended to have a racket to-night."
 "It looks so."
 "And you stay?"
 "Yes."
 "Enough. I'll let the game go on."
 "That's my wish."

The detective slipped back to the bar-room, and a few moments later Byron also reappeared, and set to attend to his business. He was doing a lively business, and his young assistant was kept busy waiting on customers.

After a few minutes, the man who had first spoken to Byron sought another opportunity and said:

"Have you tumbled to anything?"
 "I think he is here."
 "Can you designate him?"
 "I would not dare do that."
 "Why not?"
 "I may be wrong, but if we go on with the original scheme, it will pull him out."
 "Will you tell me whom you suspect?"
 "Yes; but you must remember it is only a suspicion."
 "That is all right."
 The tavern-keeper was glad to be free to do as requested, as it aided him in his original desire to remain "solid" with both sides.
 "You see the old man over by the wall?"
 "Yes."
 "The one in the light coat?"
 "Yes."
 "It's my idea that Night-Hawk is under that coat."

The robber walked away, and, taking a seat, took an opportunity to closely examine the detective.

The latter looked innocent and harmless enough, and the robber almost felt as though he could go over and unmask him; but he remembered that looks were deceiving sometimes.

After a careful survey, he again sought Byron.

"Are you sure you are right?"
 "No, I am not sure; but he is the man I've selected in my own mind."
 "We must not make a mistake."
 "If he follows you out, there can be no mistake."
 "That's so," assented the man. He set to carry out the scheme.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DURING all the time the talk was going on between Byron and the leader of the gang, the detective had, as the sailors say, his "weather-eye open," and, as matters proved later on, a still deeper game was going on in another direction.

Men were standing at the bar drinking in a seemingly friendly manner, and it was in their midst, as our readers will learn anon, that a little skirmishing was progressing.

At length the leader of the gang tipped his signal, and Byron and the three robbers left the saloon, and a moment later the disguised detective also slipped out.

Once outside, the three robbers and Byron proceeded toward the barn, and after a moment the leader, as a shadow fell across the lights from the house, whispered:

"He comes."
 "What's your game?" demanded Byron.
 "Oh, you wait and you will see how we intend to work it."
 "Don't go too fast."
 "Why not?"
 "You're playing against the smartest man in the world!"
 "We know it; but have you any points?"
 "No: I'm only warning you."
 "Well, he's not smart, this time."
 The detective had taken up a position near the barn, and just as the robber said, "You will see!" a shrill whistle rang out, and the three robbers dashed from the barn.

A startling sight was presented; the two men had a third man backed up against the barn; and the third man stood stern and silent.

As the leader of the party approached, he demanded:

"What is going on here?"
 "We caught this fellow dodging around here and listening to your talk."
 "Aha! He is a spy, eh?"
 "That's what he is, dead sure!"
 The leader addressed the man pressed against the barn.
 "Who are you?" he demanded.
 "What's that your business?"
 "Give me an answer. Your life is in danger."

"My life is in danger?"
 "Yes, old man."
 "How so?"
 "There's been a crime committed around here, and we are looking for the assassin. You are caught under suspicious circumstances, and you must give an account of yourself."

"Ah! that's all, eh?"
 "Yes; that's all; and it's enough, I reckon."
 "So you fellows have had business on hand?"
 "Yes."
 "So have I."
 "What was your business?"
 "To find out what yours was, to speak plainly."

"He admits he was spying," said one of the men.
 "Yes, I admit I was spying."
 "What were you after?"
 "Well, we were on the same 'lay.' I was trying run down some thieves."
 "Shall we arrest him, cap?"
 "Yes."

"Hold on, my good friends; do not put your hands on me."
 "If he resist, knock him down!" said the leader.

The men were but too ready to carry out the suggestion, when there came a startling interruption; a man, who in every way resembled the man pressed against the barn, suddenly appeared in their midst, and the new-comer exclaimed:

"Hello! what's going on here?"
 The robbers stood and gazed in dire amazement. Here was a strange dilemma; two men as much alike, seemingly, as a pair of twins, stood in their midst.

The new-comer repeated his question:
 "What's going on here, I'm asking?"
 The robbers and schemers stood aghast.
 A third time the double asked:

"What is going on here?"
 "Who are you, anyhow?" demanded the leader of the gang after a moment.

"I'm a spy!" came the startling answer.
 There followed the click of a pistol lock, when, suddenly, a third man appeared upon the scene, and he too was in appearance another spy, as he was gotten up to closely resemble the other two men. He started in with the same query:

"Hello, what's going on here?"
 The robbers were more and more amazed, but their leader kept his head, and remarked, quietly:

"I reckon it's a mistake all round."
 The detective answered:
 "There's not much mistake about it; you're beat."

The robbers gazed into each other's faces, when Tom Hawk suddenly uttered a shrill

whistle, and an instant later three other men came from out the darkness and joined the group.

"Now, then, my friends, we've got you," said Tom.

The robbers began to realize that they had fallen into a trap, and made to get away, but were brought to a stand.

"Surrender!" cried the detective in a stern voice.

"What does this outrage mean?" demanded the rascal who had acted as leader.

"It means that you lads are beat at your own game."

"What game had we?"

"Oh, don't play innocent. I'm Tom Hawk. You had a game to catch me, and I had a game to get you all in a heap, and I've got you."

The leader of the gang turned to Byron, and in a fierce tone said:

"Aha! you have betrayed us after all!"

"No one has betrayed you; I've outwitted you. Byron is as bad as any of you, and he is my prisoner along with the rest."

"Do you arrest me?" demanded the tavern-keeper.

"Certainly."

"Am I to be held responsible because my house has been made the head-quarters of both sides?"

"You may be able to explain your hand in the matter, Byron, but not to me; my orders call for your arrest with the balance of the gang; they are all wanted on old charges."

The men would have shown fight, but they were hemmed in, and they well knew that resistance meant death, and, in a few moments, the darbies were on every one of them, including Byron.

The latter, however, was not marched away, and, after the other fellows had been marched off, he was released, and, later on, an explanation followed between the detective and tavern-keeper.

"Well, old man, it was well managed."

"I am ruined!" moaned the tavern-keeper.

"No, you are not ruined."

"They will suspect me."

"There will not be any of them left to harm you if you do your duty."

"What can I do?"

"Make a clean breast to me."

"What can I tell you?"

"You know there is a robbery planned for to-night, and it was part of the game to keep me here, at least, even if I were not downed. So now open up, or indeed you are a doomed man!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I HAVE nothing to open up," said Byron.

"Ah, I see you are trading too largely on my good nature, my friend. I see clean through you, and there is but one chance for you."

"What can I do?"

"Open up the scheme."

A moment Byron was silent; but after a time he said:

"I have not been let into their game; but I have an idea."

"What is your idea?"

"There is to be a robbery to-night, I think."

"Aha, so I thought. Is Pell in the game?"

"I think he is."

"You have not seen him lately?"

"No."

"Be careful now; answer me truly."

"I have not seen him."

"Have you heard from him?"

"I heard the gang speak of him."

Byron was very pale.

"Come now, old man, there is a chance for you to run clear now."

"There is a scheme against a bank."

"At N—?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"Who are in the game?"

"Five men, I think."

"Enough, Byron. If your information is good you will find you have done yourself great service."

Without another word the detective left the tavern. He knew that it required prompt action.

A keen game had been played. He had lost a link, but if his good horse Badger was good for anything, he would make up his blunder, and would hook on the missing link to his chain.

The detective proceeded a short distance down the road, when he came to a clump of trees which grew close up beside the road, and putting his fingers to his lips, he uttered a whistle, and an instant later Badger came prancing toward him like a playful dog.

Tom Hawk leaped into the saddle and was away like the wind, and in a few moments had covered as much ground as a racer would measure in the same time on a level track. He dismounted at a little house and knocked at the door, which was opened by a resolute-looking man.

"Are you ready, Jack?"

"All ready."

"Is Wade with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, rouse him and follow me as quick as you can to N—; the devils mean to crack the bank to-night!"

"All right! we'll be right after you."

Tom Hawk gave his aid a few special instructions, and again mounted his horse and was away.

He had an eight-mile ride, and, looking at his watch, calculated just the time he thought he required to cover the distance.

It was a good night for the cracksmen's risky enterprise; the sky had become overcast, and a Cimmerian darkness pervaded. Tom Hawk let his good steel go free, and in due time reached the town where the bank was situated. He did not ride right into the place, but dismounted in the outskirts, and let his well-trained horse wander off at his own sweet will, and, with our reader's permission, we will digress for a few moments to relate a comic adventure that attended the intelligent steed.

The detective dismounted, and fixing the reins in the saddle, spoke a few words to his horse, and the animal walked off, while the Night-Hawk stole away toward the town. Badger found a pasture field some distance down the road, and without waiting for permission, leaped the fence and found himself in clover. With all his intelligence it is fair to suppose he did not distinguish the immorality of nibbling clover which did not belong to him, and he set to for a good meal, as his master had kindly unbitted him so as to permit him to feed.

It so happened while Badger was feeding, a fellow who was noted for his evil propensities came along the road, and espied a fully caparisoned horse quietly grazing.

As Badger, under the circumstances, was a genuine horse-thief while filling his stomach with clover, so the fellow who had espied him was a horse-thief also, as it was the latter's game to steal horse, grass, and all.

The horse-thief made up his mind, as he leaped the fence and approached nearer to the grazing animal, that he was a runaway, and by the same token he decided to run away with the horse.

The fellow considered himself in luck. He was a regular "pick up," a rascal that "froze on" to a "sleeper" of any sort; indeed, he was a first-class "nipper," and would steal anything from a church-bell to a young suckling pig, and when he saw the horse he was filled with delight. All he had to do was mount and away, and he was ready.

As the man approached the horse kept on quietly grazing, and the man actually drew near and patted him in a familiar manner, and not noticing that the horse was unbitted, he mounted, and then the fun commenced. Badger walked off for a few steps and then suddenly reared high in air and fell back, and the man, taken unawares, slid off in a heap, and the horse went for him, and seizing him by the nape of his coat lifted him from the ground and shook him dog-fashion.

The man yelled with terror, when the horse trotted with him to the edge of the field and dropped him over the fence into the road and actually whinnied, and the whinny sounded like a horse-laugh. The man thought he had tackled the devil himself in the guise of a horse, and leaping out of the road-ditch into which he had been dumped he took to his heels and ran like a deer, as though Old Nick were indeed after him, while Badger returned to his feed and nibbled quietly and complacently the farmer's clover.

Meantime, while Badger, the knowing horse, was encountering his little adventure, his master was engaged in more serious business.

The detective proceeded to the vicinity of the bank, when he came to a halt and took a sur-

vey, and, after a moment, became convinced that he was a little ahead of time.

"All right," he muttered, "I've got 'em sure now if they come!"

He did not have long to wait before learning that he had received the right "tip;" from his place of hiding he saw a dark figure approach the bank and take a survey, and a few moments later a second dark figure appeared upon the scene, and so the fellows came until five of them were huddled together.

They did not spend much time in consultation. One of the men was placed on guard, and the other four entered the bank, effecting an entrance with the utmost ease, as they had come fully prepared for the excursion.

Tom Hawk lay low and watched, and at length a sight met his gaze which gave him the proper assurance.

"Now, my hearties," he said, "I'll cut short your little racket, and put you fellows in a safer place than is the treasure you are after!" The detective made a move.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TOM HAWK had considerable of the Indian cuteness and cunning in his methods, and he crawled slowly and patiently forward. It was his design to capture the robber sentinel, and having secured him advance and "take in" the balance of the gang.

The sentinel sat upon the curb near the bank. It was evident the fellow thought all was secure, and that his duty was a mere formality. And nearer and nearer the hand of fate was creeping toward him.

Tom Hawk was a man of extraordinary nerve naturally, and long experience amidst trying adventures had resulted in a coolness and steadiness in moments of peril that were simply marvelous.

When within only a few feet of his victim, at a moment when if discovered his doom was sealed, the detective was as cool as when he first started to crawl toward his man.

The robber was armed. Even as he sat with his eyes half closed he held a cocked revolver in his hand ready at the first moment of danger to shoot down whoever might approach.

It was a critical moment, and should the robber have the first sight of our hero, he would have the drop on him and it was good-bye, my good Night-Hawk, forever.

Tom wished to divert the man's attention, and in the darkness he cast a pebble over beyond the sentinel. The fellow heard the noise and sprang to his feet, turning away from our hero, and this was just what the latter desired, and at once he sprang to his feet, leaped forward, and his powerful arm encircled the throat of his captive; the robber could not speak; he was held in a grip of iron, literally pinioned and helpless.

Tom wrenched the weapon from his grasp, twisted the fellow's head until he was almost insensible, and then bore him to the ground. The detective was upon him and a gag was fitted in his mouth, handcuffs were adjusted to his wrists, and a silk handkerchief bound his feet together, and, rising from off his man, the officer remarked in an undertone:

"I reckon that will do!"

The detective had just finished with his captive when two dark figures stole up beside him.

"How is it, Tom?"

"All right."

"Are they here?"

"Here's one of them."

"Aha! and now?"

"Well, you lads just lay low. I don't want to disturb them until they are well on with their work. I do not wish to take them on an attempt. I want 'em dead to rights on the charge of bank robbery, and I'll have 'em this time dead sure!"

A few moments the three detectives waited. They were all resolute fellows, and in a fight were a host in themselves.

At length Tom Hawk exchanged signals with his companions and entered the door of the bank, which opened with equal facility as for the men he was "piping."

Once in the bank, he commenced to crawl along slowly, and soon gained a position inside the rail, and stood at the hatch-opening leading down to the vaults where the treasure safes were located.

A strange and weird sight met his gaze.

The men had cast aside their masks, and had just succeeded in completing the drill into which they were to insert the powder preparatory to blowing the treasure-box open.

The men went about their work very cozy, and appeared to think that all was lovely. Indeed, one of them remarked, as the wad was driven in on the powder:

"Night-Hawk will open his eyes in the morning, when he learns how we worked this little racket right under his nose!"

"Night-Hawk may never open his eyes again!" came the reply.

"It's a pity!"

"Why?"

"Well, I'd like to have him know that he ain't the greatest man on earth."

"He's pretty smart."

"So you will find, my hearties," mentally rejoined the detective, as a complacent smile beamed on his determined face.

"He's a daisy," and if the lads down him, we'll have easy sailing for a spell."

"I don't think they'll down him," said one of the men.

"Then they're 'slouches,' or Byron will sell them out."

"I would not fake much stock in Byron myself."

"Bah! we'll drop him out after a bit. He's fell into too much of our business."

"It might have been better if he had been dropped out sooner."

The man who had been fixing the fuse got it rightly adjusted, and said:

"Now, boys, we'll have a little Fourth of July, so lay low."

The detective did not interfere. He did not wish to catch them on a mere tamper. He calculated the bank could afford the damage to the safe so long as its contents was saved to them. He was a cool-head and understood his business. He intended to have his men dead to rights when he did get them, and the game was working his way.

Three of the men laid themselves to one side with their heads covered, while the operator bound a wet rag over the powder-filled aperture in order to deaden the sound of the explosion, when he dropped on his breast and reached forward and lighted the fuse.

Our hero could see the whole operation, and, could an artist have caught the whole picture just as it was presented at that moment, he would have had a striking scene indeed.

The little fuse slowly burned toward the explosive material—a tiny little spark.

A moment passed and there came a dull thud. A puff of smoke flashed up through the hatch, and filled the back room for a moment, and then all was still.

When the smoke cleared away, the operator took his masked-lantern, and flashed its light glare upon the place where the explosion had taken place.

"That was a daisy puffer, boys!"

"Is it all right?"

"We've the wealth of the whole county at our command. Have your bags ready for the 'swag.'"

"All ready," came the answer.

"Well, give me the bar, and we'll soon be into the Ceresus' box."

The men were just as merry as men could be, and so was the detective, as he contemplated the startling little surprise he had for them when the proper time came.

Tom stepped out to the door for a word with his aids, and the grand tableau followed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TOM HAWK returned to his position in the bank, and, glancing down, saw that the men had succeeded in opening the safe, and their bags were drawn up ready opened to receive the "swag."

"This is the best job of the year," said one.

"The best of our lives!" remarked another.

"Won't old Night-Hawk squeal when he learns of our trick?" suggested a third.

"We are all right, boys!" said the last.

The moment for our hero to act had arrived. He, stretching himself out face forward, with his arms extended over the opening and his weapons pointing down at the men, he was ready.

"We have got a haul this time, lads!" exclaimed the leader, as he pulled out a package of greenbacks that would have made a bankrupt's eyes water.

"Ha! ha! what would old Night-Hawk say if he saw us handling this 'boodle'?"

"Your mind appears to run on Night-Hawk," said one of the others.

"Yes; 'his memory haunts me still.'"

"Did you ever meet him?"

"I did."
 "Where?"
 "West—and just at the moment when we thought we had things all hunkey."
 "Well, you won't meet him to-night."
 "I hope not."
 Just at that moment there came a warning:
 "Hist!"

The men stood aghast, their eyes became fixed, and they were frozen to the appearance of so many rough statues.

"What's that?" said a voice in a husky whisper.

Silence followed, broken a moment later by a second warning:

"Hist!"
 "Who's there?"
 "Lay low."
 "What's up?"
 "We're 'piped'!"

The men's faces looked as though they had suddenly been transformed into so many apparitions.

"Eh? what is it?"
 "Some one is here."
 "Who?"
 "Night-Hawk!"
 "The devil!" came the exclamation.
 "Where is he?"
 "Here."

"How do you mean?"
 "What I say."
 "What must we do?"
 "Surrender!" came the command.

The men gave a yell; at once their lights were extinguished and the "Growler" muttered in a whisper:

"Just as I feared; that fellow always steps in at the last moment!"

The men were caught like so many mice in a trap; there was no exit from the cellar except through the trap-door up through the bank.

All was still for a moment, but Night-Hawk broke the stillness by saying:

"It's no use, boys, I've got you dead to rights this time! Night-Hawk is here, and his eyes are open; he can't stand the laugh on him!"

"See here, old man, we're armed," said the leader.

"Are you?"
 "Yes."
 "Well?"
 "You've spoiled the game."
 "That's what I came here to do."
 "Don't let there be any row."

"Eh?"
 "Don't lets take the chances of a fight."
 "Eh?"
 "We won't give in without a struggle."
 "You won't, eh?"

"No."
 "That's your own look out. If you want to be dropped out, all right."
 "We won't go down alone."
 "Oh, you won't?"
 "No."

"Well, now, you lads just listen. I want you to come up out of there one at a time."
 "Nixie."

"You won't, eh?"
 "We won't."
 "Then I will send down a few balls for you to feed on."

The men held a whispered consultation.
 "What shall we do, boys?"
 "Go up with a rush."
 "Who'll go first?"
 "Ah, that's the question we must settle; but do you think he's alone?"

"He generally travels alone."
 "But we've one thing to consider."
 "What's that, honey?"
 "He came here with all the points."
 "That's so."
 "He knows how many are in our gang."
 "That's so."
 "He knows our style."
 "And that's so."

"Well, he wouldn't come alone. We're goners."

"What, is it a dead cave?"
 "It's a dead cave, unless there's one man who will take the lead; but it may as well be understood it's sure death to some one, if we attempt a rush up those stairs."

"That's my way of thinking, boys."
 "What can we do?"
 "There's only one thing to do."
 "Knock?"
 "Yes."
 "We'll strike for terms."

"Go it."
 "Hellow, there, Mr. Hawk!"
 "I'm here, my dadies."
 "Will you give us a show?"
 "How?"
 "Let up on us."
 "You're cool."
 "We've got a deal yet."
 "Have you?"
 "Yes."

"Run off your cards, and when you get through I'll play my trump."

"Is there no let up?"
 "No let up."
 "It's fight or surrender?"
 "That's the size of it, boys."
 "You're hard on us."
 "Am I?"
 "Yes."

"Well, you fellows ain't hard stealing the earnings of the poor people around here. Now, listen; I've got you dead, and it's no quarter. Come up here one at a time or I commence operations, and if I do the chances are that you'll all be fitted for wooden cvercoats."

"What will we do, boys?"
 "He means business."
 "He does."
 "Well, our jig's up."
 "Mr. Hawk!"
 "Well?"
 "Will you let one of us go free?"
 "No."
 "You're bound to nip us all?"
 "I am."

There was a few moments silence. The burglars consulted with each other. They felt that they were in a mouse-trap and that escape was impossible.

Tom Hawk was too old a hand not to know exactly what he was about. They would have risked an effort to escape with any other man.

"You don't give us any show."
 "I don't mean to give you any."
 "Let up on us and we'll let you into a big racket."

"There's no let up. You're my prisoners, every man of you without conditions; and now it's surrender or I open on you. How shall it be?"

CHAPTER XL.

The men held another consultation.

"Boys, he's got us dead sure!"
 "Just the way he 'nipped' the gang the time I spoke of. The man is the devil, I tell you!"

"Well, let's bid each other good-bye; we're goners, and may never meet again on sweet midnight rackets; but it's hard to be 'nipped' when we thought we had the thing so dead sure."

"Indeed it is, but there's no help for it. Shall we die, or walk up and take the 'darbies'?"

"With life there is hope."
 "You're right."
 "We've big influence, although he's got us clean."

"I am not ready to die," said one.
 "Nor I," said another; and they all reached the same conclusion.

"Then, all we've got to do, boys, is surrender."

"That's our only chance now."

"Captain," called the leader, "we've concluded."

"Ah! have you?"

"Yes."

"Well, are you prepared to die?"

"No."

"What's your decision?"

"We surrender."

"That's sensible, seeing you couldn't do anything else."

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, come up one at a time and get your decorations, and if there's any attempt at a double deal it will go hard with the gang."

The detective had signaled to his companions, and one of them joined him, and while Hawk stood ready with drawn revolvers, his aid stood ready to slip on the darbies.

"Come along!" called out hero, and one of the men walked up the steps from the vault. He was quickly secured and the detective called:

"Come up, number two!"

The second man came up, and the detective scanned him closely by the dim light, and a

shade of disappointment rested upon his firm features. The second man was secured and the detective called:

"Come up, number three!"

The third man came up, and the shade deepened on the detective's face, but after the fellow was secured he called:

"Come, number four!"

The fourth man came up, and the detective uttered an exclamation of disappointment and, after the fellow was secured, he said:

"Where's Pell?"

"He was not with us to-night."

"He wasn't in with you, eh?"

"No."

"He was one of the original party?"

"How do you know?" came the question.

The men were sullen and independent after they were really secured.

"How did I know anything about your scheme?"

"That's just what we would like to know; and we'll find out some day!"

Tom Hawk had done a big night's work. He had saved the bank from loss and had captured five more of the gang.

Upon the morning following the incidents we have described, when the news went abroad there was great excitement, but the hero of the adventure kept under cover. His prisoners were turned over to the proper officials to abide the time when they were to be called to trial.

In the meantime there was great consternation in another direction. In a tavern located in a certain well-known river city of considerable importance were gathered three men. They were discussing in an undertone the exciting news.

"Stanley," said one of the men, "we're done for! That man is too much for us!"

"It's a matter I do not understand."

"Some one is giving us away."

"That you may bet! The detective could not get things down so fine on us unless some one was leaking."

"Who can it be?"

"Ah, that's the question; who can it be?"

"I've a suspicion," said one of the men.

"What's your suspicion?"

"Pell is keeping very low on us. He was to have been in the last racket, and he got out just in time to escape; and every scheme he has been in has resulted in disaster, and he has always managed to escape. The best men in our gang are now in hock; we're bankrupt, and things look blue."

"If we could only lay out Night-Hawk!"

"Yes, if we could only lay him out; but he's laying us all in, and soon we'll be a happy party."

"What can we do?"

"That's the question—what can we do?"

"There are three of us?"

"Yes."

"Let's set ourselves to beat this man—we can do it."

"We thought we had it done last night; but where have we come out?"

"How about Byron?"

"It strikes me that he is all right."

"Did he have the points on this last racket?"

"No, not all the points."

"Then it would appear that it is some other man who leaks."

"Yes."

"Where can Pell be found?"

"He was to meet me to-day?"

"Where?"

"Here."

"We must get him somewhere, and have a safe talk with him."

"That's my idea."

At this moment the door opened, and the man Pell entered the place.

"Hello, old fellow! we were talking about you."

Pell was an easy-going sort of fellow in his manner, and he said:

"I hope you were not speaking ill of me."

"No, no; but you've heard how matters went last night?"

"Yes."

"And you had a lucky escape."

"Yes; I did."

"It would appear that you had a point."

"Has any one dared to say that I did?" said the man as a fierce light shone in his eyes.

"No; but it does seem that you were born under a lucky star."

"I should have been in last night's racket, only for one thing. I had another scheme on hand: and, boys, if my matter goes through

"I'll be fixed to make matters all right; but I must have assistance."

"What is your game?"

"Another raid on the Castle."

"Eh? you want to get another pair of us in the same hock as Cheesy and Snagsy?"

"I want to make a big haul. I've big nerve and I only want one man to help me."

"Only one man, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who is the fellow you want to drop out now?"

The man Pell fixed his eyes on the speaker and said:

"You mean something by that remark."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, meb be I do."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you square."

"Sing out your tenor."

"I think you're in with Tom Hawk, that's plain."

"You men suspect me?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XLI.

The men sat glaring at each other.

"Let it come," said Pell.

"You're a new-comer up here, and since you appeared in our midst you've been an evil genius; all our trouble has come since we swore you in!"

"Am I to be held responsible for that?"

"Yes, if you've had a hand in it; and I might as well tell you; it's been whispered afore that you were only a 'feeler' for the 'cop.'"

"You fellows don't know me, that's all, or you'd never set in on me this way. I tell you I'm square, and I'll prove it."

"How?"

"You are all in trouble."

"Yes, we are."

"No scap."

"Not enough to buy a steel pen to sign a note."

"I've got a job on hand."

"No doubt."

"I understand your meaning when you say 'no doubt.' It means I've a job on hand to drop out some more of the lads."

"Well, you can take it so."

"I'll prove to the contrary."

"I hope you will."

"And I will."

"How?"

"I'll go my next job alone—take all the risks."

"That's good."

"If I succeed I'll have money."

"That will be better."

"I'll chip it in."

"That will be better still."

"And you fellows will be satisfied?"

"Well, yes."

"All right. I'll win or lose this time, and I'll drop my all into the chance."

The three robbers appeared to be pretty well satisfied with their pal's declarations.

Upon the night following the above detailed conversation between the three robbers, Tom Hawk appeared at Byron's. The detective had worked a remarkable little game. He had selected a prototype, a fellow called Silent Jim; the latter was a man who frequented Byron's place and who had earned his *sobriquet* by his singular silence. He was an elderly man not well known save by sight, and no one appeared to be acquainted with his history, although there was a rumor that he was an old crank who had been disappointed in love and who had settled down into a sort of idiotic existence.

The man was about the same stature as the detective, possessed the same colored eyes, the same shaped face, but his hair was gray.

Detectives, like actors, oftentimes select a model when designing a disguise, and our hero had made a study of the habits and actions of Silent Jim, and to what purpose he had utilized his studies will be disclosed as our narrative progresses.

A few men only were gathered in Byron's place and those were discussing the recent capture of the burglars.

The keeper of the place, although attending to business, was very greatly excited and nervous. He did not know just how the capture would affect him, and he was the more despondent, not having seen or heard from the detective. Indeed, muttering to himself when an opportunity offered, he said:

"He's played me for all I'm worth, and now he's going to leave me to the mercy of the gang; but let him look out, I may turn and get him 'downed' yet."

Later in the evening Silent Jim entered the tavern. But little attention was paid to him as he walked over to his accustomed seat in one corner of the bar-room and motioned for his usual beverage.

Byron waited on the man and returned to his other customers, and so the evening passed until quite late, when most of the men went away and the bar-room was left to Byron, one other customer, and Silent Jimmy.

The tavern-keeper at length exchanged glances with the man who had remained, and finally addressing Silent Jimmy, he said:

"I am going to close up, my friend."

"And you want me to go?"

"Yes."

Silent Jimmy paid his score, rose and left the house, while the one other customer remained, and when alone the two men uncovered.

"Where have you been, Pell?"

"I've been working a little scheme."

"Matters have gone badly?"

"Yes; and the gang suspect me of having given things away."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"I don't see how they could suspect you."

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Well, Byron, I've something to say to you. It's my opinion that you have given facts away."

"Hold on; I don't want you to come here giving me that; I've taken too much of that talk already."

"Some one must have leaked."

"You know the facts?"

"What are the facts?"

"Night-Hawk has been lying around here under a dozen different disguises. You fellows have held your consultations, and he's picked up the crumbs and made his loaf."

"But you knew he was around here?"

"No, I didn't until the last moment, and when I tumbled to his 'cover' I put the lads on him and they set to drop him out; but some way he doubled on them, got the points, and five more of the boys are in 'hock.'"

A moment Pell remained silent, and at length he said in a low tone:

"Do you ever do active work?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you ever get into a scheme?"

"Well, I have in my time. Why do you ask?"

"I've a big scheme on hand."

Byron turned pale.

"You ain't going to ask me to join you?"

"No; but I'll let you in."

"Can't take the risk."

"The work is light, and stakes will be big, and I'll do all the work."

"What's your racket?"

"Oh, I'm not opening up unless I know you will go in with me."

"And I'm not going in unless I know what the 'fig' is; I don't get into these matters 'blind.'"

"There is only one thing you will have to do."

"What is that?"

"Drive me over to the scene of operation, wait until I do the job, and then bring me away."

"What is your job?"

"I know where a big heap of governments is 'cased.'"

"Verily?"

"Yes."

"When will you work the game?"

"To-morrow night."

"All you want me to do is to act as coachee?"

"Yes."

"How about the 'swag'?"

"You shall have your share."

"On a quick division?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me where the governments are hidden."

"I'm not giving that away."

"Who else will be in the scheme?"

"No one; you and I will go it alone, and if we succeed, you are a rich man, and can 'skip' from this side the country and live like a prince the balance of your life."

"It looks like a big opening."

"It is a big opening."

"I'll think the matter over."

"You must decide now."

"Well, I'll go in with you."

CHAPTER XLII.

It is hardly necessary to inform our readers that Silent Jimmy for the night was Tom Hawk under "cover." There were reasons why the detective desired to visit Byron's place hidden even from Byron himself; the fact was he expected certain disclosures, but not of the character which actually came, and again a dead sure "cover" even against Byron was a matter of safe policy, as the remaining members of the gang would be in a bloody mood after the trick that had been won against them.

When Tom entered the place he recognized the man Pell, and also discovered that the fellow was under "cover," and at once made up his mind that there was a game on hand.

Under the circumstances detailed, it is also hardly necessary to state that the detective made up his mind to overhear any little talk that might pass between Pell and the tavern-keeper; and he did overhear every word that passed, and he rejoiced in having taken in the confidence, as a suspicion had all along run through his mind that there was danger of a tragedy in a certain direction, and although Pell refused to tell Byron where the "governments" were hidden, the detective discerned easily enough, and congratulated himself upon his forethought in getting under a complete "cover."

When Byron said he would go in on the racket, Pell said:

"Old man, I've put a good deal of confidence in you, and now if any one tumbles to this little business there will be no question as to who 'leaks.'"

Byron grew thoughtful, an odd suspicion flashed through his mind.

"See here, Pell," he exclaimed, "if you are on any double-bank game with me, you're starting up the wrong man!"

"Bah! what game could I have?"

"I'll tell you. There has been some leaking, and suspicion has been turned against you, and you may want to turn it on me, but you can't do it!"

"Will you open clean up?"

"Yes, I will. You may give this thing to me, go and give it to some one else, and then claim that I 'leaked.'"

"You are a keen fellow, Byron."

"I'm keen enough to look out and not be 'trapped.'"

"You need not fear; this is a good scheme I have on hand. I will win or be dropped out. You come in for a 'rake' without taking any chances. Do you want anything better than that?"

"No."

"Very well: to-morrow we will put the matter through. You have a wagon at midnight; put in a coop of chickens, as though you were going to market, and meet me at the cross-roads, just where we strike to go across the mountain."

"At what hour?"

"Midnight."

"Exactly at midnight?"

"Yes."

"All right; I will be on hand. But remember, if any job is put up on me, it will be the worse for you; I've a little trick to play that will make you sick."

"You have nothing to fear if you are straight yourself—you have everything to make."

A few moments later the men separated and Pell left the tavern; the man proceeded away from the village and went to a house situated in a lonely district. He had just opened the door to enter the house when he heard a cry. The man stopped and listened and he heard a moan.

"What can it be?" he muttered, and he walked down to the gate and listened and again he heard a groan, and, as he cast his eyes around under the starlight, his glance rested upon a dark heap in the middle of the road. He walked over and found an old woman lying as though she had fallen and injured herself.

"What is the matter with you, my good woman?" asked the burglar.

"Who speaks?"
 "I do."
 "Who are you?"
 "No matter; are you in trouble?"
 "Yes."
 "What can I do for you?"
 "Help me to my feet."
 The burglar helped the woman to her feet and she fixed her eyes upon him; she was a strange, weird-looking creature.
 "Do you live there?" she asked, pointing to the house.

"Yes."
 "Take me in there."
 "Why do you wish to go there?"
 "I am tired; I wish to rest and I wish to talk to you. I see you do not recognize me."
 "No; I do not recognize you."
 "I am old Mother Rooney."

Old Mother Rooney was a strange old hermit, who lived in a hut away up on the mountain. She was a strange character—professed to be a witch and fortune-teller, and many strange stories were told concerning her. Many people considered her an old fraud, and there were others among the poorer and ignorant classes, who had great faith in her, and her medicines were even purchased by some people who would openly have avoided using them.

Pell had heard of old Mother Rooney, but he did not care much about her, and would have refused to take her into the house, and would not have bothered further with her, were it not for a strange remark she made concerning himself.

"You are from over the sea?" she said.
 The young man gave a start.
 "Aha! I know who you are. I knew your father."

"You knew my father?"
 "Yes; I knew your father. I was coming here to see you, when I fell; you may laugh at me, but, young man, I could tell you things that would make your hair stand on end!"

The old crone spoke in a weird tone, and she raised her long arm warningly while making her strange statement.

"What can you tell me?"
 "Let's go in the house, where we can talk."
 "No; we can not go in the house."
 "Why not?"

"My friends have retired for the night, and I do not wish to arouse them."
 "Come to-morrow and see me at my hut."
 "I do not know where your hut is, old woman."

"Any boy in the village can guide you to old Mother Rooney's hut. They won't come nigh me, though; no, no. I fixed the boys; they don't annoy me, although I am old."

"I will not have time to come to your hut."
 "You had better come."
 "I may come some day."
 "No, come to-morrow."
 "Why to-morrow?"
 "I've something to tell you."

"Nonsense, old woman, you can't make anything out of me."
 "You think I want to make something out of you, eh?"

"Certainly, I do."
 "You have no faith in me?"
 "No."
 "No faith in my powers?"
 "No."

"You're a fool!"
 "Thank you; but I've no more time to bother with you."

"Yes, you have time to bother with me; you were with me last night."
 "I was, eh?"

"Yes, I called you up in my incantations, and I read you through and through."
 "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes; I know more of you than any other person in this country!"
 "What is my name?"
 "Your name is not Pell."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THERE was a peculiar emphasis in the tones and manner of old Mother Rooney when she said, "Your name is not Pell."

The burglar gave a start and turned pale, and his keen, fierce eyes were fixed upon the old witch as he repeated:

"My name is not Pell, eh?"
 "No."

"What is my name?"

The old witch laughed.
 "Come, come, old woman, you say my name is not Pell; what is my name?"

"Will you take me into the house?"
 "No."
 "Will you come to my hut to-morrow?"
 "No."
 "Will you go with me to-night?"
 "No."
 "Then you do not believe in my powers?"
 "I do not."
 "How would I know your name is Pell?"
 "Easy enough."
 "How would I know that your name is not Pell?"

The man was silent.
 "Come with me to my hut and you shall hear strange revelations."

"Make your revelations here and now."
 "I would be alone with you."
 "We are alone here."

"We do not know who may be listening."
 "Who could listen?"
 "Night-Hawk."

"Ah, you know him?"
 "As well as I know you."
 "And you fear him, eh?"

"No, I do not fear him; but I would not have any one overhear my revelations to you."
 "And you have revelations to make to me?"

"Yes."
 "Make them."
 "Not here."

"Come, I will walk with you to the grove yonder."

"No, no, come to my hut to-morrow!"

"Bah! you are a fraud."

"You do not believe it; you are amazed at what I have already revealed; you have come to this country on a mission; you have kept your secret well, taking no one into your confidence, and yet I know your secret while your lips have remained sealed. How would I know all unless I possessed occult powers?"

"Well tell me all you know."
 "No, no, I will not! I wish to make a compact with you."

"So I have come here on a mission?"
 "Yes."

"You know that?"
 "Yes."

"Then you must know the nature of my mission."

"I do."
 "What is it?"
 "I will not reveal more now."

"Why not?"
 "I have a purpose in my revelations."
 "What is your purpose?"

"Come with me to my hut and I will tell you all."

"I will not go, but I will go to the grove yonder."

"Meet me in the grove to-morrow."
 "No, I can not."

"Ah, you will be busy making arrangements for your little midnight job."

The man again gave a start.
 "Woman!" he cried, as he advanced toward her with a fierce expression upon his face, "what do you mean?"

"Bah! you can not scare me; I am not afraid. With one touch I could strike you dead; and I could aid you."

"Aid me?"
 "Yes."

"How do you know I need aid?"
 The hag laughed and answered:
 "I know what you contemplate; but listen. I could give you a little vial containing a liquid that you would have to put but one drop of in a wound as large as a needle's head, and death would be certain—and all the physicians in the world could not detect the trick."

The man glanced at the old witch.
 "Come, will you go with me to my hut?"

"You talk to me as though you were my friend."

"Yes."
 "Why is it you take such an interest in me?"
 "Because you hate where I hate."

"Ah! What do you mean?"
 "Come to my hut."

"No, no; I will not."
 "Why?"
 "I am afraid."

"Bah! you are afraid, eh? No, no; you lie. But come, I will go with you to the grove."

The two walked toward the grove. The old witch appeared very feeble and walked very slowly, while the man proceeded with head down, lost in deep thought.

In the center of the grove was a running spring, and near the spring was a cluster of rocks, and on one of the rocks the old crone

seated herself, resting her hands on her staff, and indeed she presented a weird sight as her wild eyes glared on the burglar as he stood before her, under the starlight with folded arms.
 "Now, then, old woman, what have you to say?"

"We will go back. You were asking me about your name?"

"Yes."
 "I said—I knew your real name."
 "Yes."

"I lied."
 "Aha!"

"You have no name."
 "What mean you?"
 "You are a nameless vagabond?"

"Hold! or I will throttle you."
 "No; you will not throttle me. You know your mother—you never saw your father."

The burglar's face was ghastly.
 "Aha! you see I am going straight to the hidden secrets of your soul."

The man remained silent.
 "Your mother is dead. She revealed to you the name of your father, and you knew a man living not far from here, who bears the same name, and accidentally you have discovered that you bear a most singular and striking resemblance to the son of the man who lives in the Castle."

"Woman, who are you?"

"My name is Rooney. I am old Mother Rooney; any one around here can tell you who I am; they will tell you that Mother Rooney has lived in the hut up on the mountain over forty years—lived there years before you were born—and yet she knows your secret."

"What is the object of your revelations to me?"

"I am poor; I want money."
 "Money from me?"
 "Yes, money from you."

"I am poor."
 "But you can be rich."
 "How?"

"Ah, with my aid."
 "I do not need your aid."

"Listen: without my aid you will fail in what you contemplate to-morrow night."

"What do I contemplate to-morrow night?"
 "You are set to do a robbery?"

The burglar's face became even more ghastly in its expression as he sprang forward to grasp the old woman, but as he caught sight of her hands he recoiled as though bitten by a snake, and the old woman's strange laugh rang in his ears as, with a cry of pain, he recoiled from her.

"I am old and weak and feeble, young man, but you can not harm me; I could kill you where you stand!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

PELL was subdued; he was also thoroughly impressed, and believed that the old woman really did possess occult powers, and after a moment he asked:

"Are you my friend or my enemy?"
 "That depends; but answer, have I said anything that would lead you to think I was your enemy?"

"No."
 "I may be your friend; that depends."

"On what does your friendship depend?"
 "Your confidence in me."

"How shall I prove my confidence in you?"
 "I have been able to discern only the outlines of your history and plans; I wish you to make me your full confidante, tell me all."

"What shall I tell you?"
 "Everything concerning yourself."

"And place myself in your power?"
 "Are you not in my power now? If I chose to use my knowledge against you, could I not have laid low with aid and have captured you to-morrow night? could I not have gone to the Castle and warned them of their danger? Come, answer me."

"But what shall I tell you?"

"Tell me all that your mother revealed to you; are you the son of the man at the Castle or his nephew? how did you come to first discover your resemblance to his son? and what are your plans?"

"You wish me to reveal all to you?"
 "Yes."

"How will you know that I am telling you the truth?"

"I will know you can not successfully lie to me."

"And if I tell you all?"

"I will prove myself your friend."

A moment the burglar tramped to and fro in the presence of the old witch, while the latter sat swaying herself in motion with her staff.

"It's strange I should meet you, old woman."

"No; it is not strange, because I sought you."

"It's strange that you should know all these facts about me."

"I possess the powers that aid me to obtain certain facts."

"And what do you want to gain by my revelations?"

"A promise that you will share your fortune with me."

"I promise to share with you, if you will aid me to obtain a fortune."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will."

"I can do you great service."

"Do so, and I will share with you."

"Answer me one question: how much of the truth have you revealed to Mr. Pladwell?"

The old witch had not before mentioned a name.

"How do you mean?"

"What story have you told to the master of the Castle?"

"How do you know that I have seen him?"

"I know that you have seen—yes, seen—him since the night you made the attempt to rob the house."

"You do appear to know everything."

"Yes, I know a great deal. There are some facts which are at my call, but others are beyond my ken: conversations are not within my powers, only facts."

"And what do you wish me to tell you?"

"Did you claim to be his son or his nephew?"

"I claimed to be his son."

"Did he acknowledge the claim?"

"At first he was puzzled; but at length it became evident that he did not regard me as his son."

"And then?"

"I claimed to be his nephew."

"Now you are coming right down to business, and I will be of service to you. When you claimed to be his nephew what did he say?"

"He said if I was his nephew he would never acknowledge me."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him if he did not acknowledge me to be his nephew I would claim to be his son."

"Aha! and then?"

"He defied me."

"You are his nephew?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances were you born?"

"I have told you so much I will tell you all."

"Proceed."

"Mr. Pladwell was once in active business. He had a younger brother, who was sent to Paris to take charge of the branch house there. The brother, Henry Pladwell, met, loved, and married an English girl."

"Married her?"

"Yes."

"Well, proceed."

"After a year he deserted her, claimed that the marriage which took place in France was invalid, and he was to marry an American girl."

"Well?"

"He died."

"Under what circumstances?"

"It was always supposed he died a natural death, but, on her death-bed, my mother confessed to me that she poisoned him."

"Did your mother ever come to America?"

"Never."

"Did she know of the elder brother?"

"Yes; and she wrote to him for assistance."

"And what did he answer?"

"He never answered her letter."

"Well, proceed."

"On her death-bed, she told me to come to America and find my uncle, adding: 'You are the perfect image of your father, and your resemblance will establish your identity.'"

"How long have you been in America?"

"One year."

"Did you present yourself to your uncle?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I will tell you all. I was a thief, and I calculated that he would only turn me off at best, and I made up my mind not to ask any odds of him, until one day I met a young man in New York who was in appearance my very self. I followed the young man, trailed him to his home and learned all about him. I had accidentally found my uncle and a cousin, whom I

resembled even as one twin brother resembles another. I found out he was secretly engaged to a young lady; I dogged their steps, and oftentimes overheard little confidences between them, and I learned of the opposition of the father to the marriage, and of the final quarrel, and then an accident occurred."

"What accident?"

"The son went away, and one day I met the young lady; she mistook me for her lover at first; merely as a joke I encouraged her in the mistake and then—"

The young man hesitated.

"Well, what then?"

"I determined to take advantage of my resemblance and her mistake to carry out a certain purpose."

"What was your purpose?"

"I had made up my mind to rob my uncle—take by force what would be refused me as a right."

"What had you as a right?"

"My father was a partner in the concern."

"He was, eh?"

"Yes; and, as the son of my father, I was entitled to his share in the business."

CHAPTER XLV.

It was a strange tale the young man was revealing; and the old witch listened with rapt attention.

"How do you know your father was a partner in the business?"

"My mother had the proofs."

"Did she not have proofs of the marriage?"

"Yes."

"And where are those proofs?"

"I have them."

"Does Mr. Pladwell know that you hold those papers?"

"I told him I did."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Did you make a claim for your father's share?"

"I did. I told him if he would give me only one portion of my father's share, I would leave America, become an honest man, and he would never see or hear of me again."

"Were you in earnest?"

"I was."

"You would really like to become an honest man?"

"Yes."

"How is it you became a thief?"

"Bad associations and poverty made a thief of me."

"But you appear to possess a good education?"

"Yes, my mother became an actress and earned money and brought me up as a gentleman. I did not know she was an actress until a little time before she died; I believed her to be a lady and myself a gentleman; but when her health failed we became very poor. I had not been taught a business, and I became a thief."

"And even now you would prefer to be an honest man?"

"Yes."

"And you would have robbed your uncle?"

"Yes—and I will."

"Why?"

"He has wronged me."

"What do you expect to gain by your uncle's death?"

"His whole fortune."

"How can you succeed in that?"

"I shall claim to be his son."

"But the real son may appear upon the scene."

The young burglar made no answer.

"What would you do under those circumstances?"

"The son will never appear."

The young man spoke in a strange tone, and there was a world of significance in his words. The old witch sprung to her feet, advanced, and laid her staff upon the shoulder of Pell, and, in a terrible voice, demanded:

"Answer me—what do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"You say the real son will never appear."

"I mean it."

"Have you harmed him?"

"You possess supernatural powers—find out."

"I will find out."

"Aha! it's as I thought—you are not my friend."

"Yes, I am your friend, but I would have

no harm come to your cousin; as to your uncle, I am willing you should obtain justice from him."

"If the son comes to dispute my claims, I can not obtain justice."

"Yes, the son is a fair man; but the father should do you justice under certain conditions."

"Eh? what is that you say?"

"I say what I mean, unless you have harmed the son. Tell me, have you done away with him?"

"No."

"You swear?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you say he will never appear?"

"I can prevent it."

"You mean to rob the father to-morrow night?"

The young man remained silent.

"Come, come, you have told me so much, tell me all."

"I do not mean to harm him."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Secure certain papers."

"What papers are they?"

"Proofs."

"How do you know he holds the papers?"

"I know he does."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get the information?"

"It is not necessary for me to tell it; it is enough that I know he holds them."

"Have you made a demand for them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He would destroy them."

"Have you seen him more than once?"

"Yes."

"And you made an appeal to him?"

"I made an appeal to him to save me and save himself."

"And his answer was—"

"That I might go to the devil and do my worst?"

"He did not fear you?"

"He said he did not."

"Did you threaten him?"

"I told him I would have my rights some day at all hazards."

"And what did he say?"

"He laughed in my face."

"He now knows who you really claim to be?"

"Yes."

"Did he ask you concerning his son?"

"No."

"What was your father's name?"

"Henry."

"And your real name is Henry Pladwell?"

"That is my real name."

"And you would really like to become an honest man?"

"I would."

"Have you ever taken human life?"

"Never."

"You are not an assassin?"

"Not yet," answered the young man in a significant tone.

"Young man, I have heard your story and am disposed to be your friend."

"Can you aid me?"

"Yes, if you will permit me."

"You hate old Pladwell?"

"Hate him!" ejaculated the old witch.

"Yes, you have a grudge against him."

"We will not talk about that now; how much money did you claim from Mr. Pladwell?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"And what did he say?"

"He laughed at me."

"Did he threaten you?"

"How threaten me?"

"Threaten to have you arrested for the attack on him?"

"No; but he did say, that in good time I would meet my dues."

"He did not exhibit any sympathy for you at all?"

"No; but he appeared to hate me, and glory in the fact that I was a felon."

"Once more you are really desirous of becoming an honest man?"

"I am."

"But you are a member of one of the worst gangs in America."

"I know I am."

"You contemplate a crime."

"I am only seeking my rights."

"And you will fail."

"I guess not."
 "You will fail: you will be arrested and punished."
 "And you propose to aid me merely by warning me?"
 "Yes."
 "All right old woman, I reckon our interview is ended."

CHAPTER XLVI.

"No, young man; we are not done with each other yet. I propose to aid you—to save you."
 "What is your interest in me, old woman?"
 "You will see soon enough."
 "I have been a fool to tell you my history."
 "No, you have not been a fool; you have made a friend. I propose to give you a warning: there is a terrible man on your track."
 "Who?"
 "Night-Hawk."
 "Bah! I do not fear him."
 "He has your record down."
 "He has, eh?"
 "Yes, and he could put his hand on you at any moment; but, for reasons, he has permitted you to run free."
 "You appear to understand Tom Hawk's intentions pretty well."
 "Yes, I do."
 "You know him?"
 "Yes."
 "And you are not a witch, after all?"
 "Have I not proven my supernatural powers?"
 "You have proven that you have been in conversation with Hawk."
 "What makes you think so?"
 "One man knows my story."
 "Who?"
 "Mr. Pladwell."
 "Well?"
 "And he has told the tale to Tom Hawk, and the detective has told the tale to you. I see through it all now."
 "You think you do?"
 "Yes."
 "You haven't the thing down just right yet; but listen to me: to-morrow's little raid will prove a failure. You will be caught!"
 "Ah, you will betray me?"
 "No; but I wish to save you. I tell you Night-Hawk can put his hands on you at any moment."
 "If he does, I may visit your hut some day, old woman."
 "Now you threaten me?"
 "Yes; I do."
 "And you will not believe I am your friend?"
 "I don't care who you are; I want no more talk with you!"
 "Well, look over there, young man."
 The young burglar turned round and gazed in the direction indicated; but in a moment he faced round, and a cry of amazement fell from his lips. The old crone had most mysteriously disappeared and in her place stood a man!
 A curse issued from the lips of the young burglar, and he made an effort as if to draw a weapon; but Night-Hawk had him covered, and said:
 "Hold on! drop your weapon, or you will suffer."
 "You are Tom Hawk?"
 "That's my name."
 "And I have betrayed myself?"
 "No; you have saved yourself. You ought to be very grateful to me. I am giving you a chance. I could have 'nipped' you to-morrow night, as I have all the points on you."
 "Byron has betrayed me so soon, eh? I see it all now."
 "Byron has not betrayed you."
 "It is not two hours since I opened up my plans and you have the whole business."
 "And no thanks to Byron for my information and so, young man, you remember the old adage, 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune; you are on that tide at this moment, you can become an honest man or you can suffer as a felon. The choice is your own.'"
 "What are you getting at, anyhow?"
 "I sympathize with you."
 "Yes, to get me in 'hock'?"
 "I could have arrested you a dozen times; I could arrest you now, but I have permitted you to go free. I could have arrested you that night you set to rob me on the road, but I let you go free."
 "Why?"
 "I've told you why; I had an idea that there

was some excuse for you; indeed I suspected the truth concerning your relationship to Mr. Pladwell."
 "Bah! he told you all."
 "He did not tell me a word: he only engaged me to 'nip' you."
 "And do you mean to tell me that you let me go free in my own interest?"
 "Not altogether; but I could have closed in on you any time, I can close in on you now."
 "Why don't you?"
 "Simply, because I wish to become your friend and make an honest man of you."
 "Do you think that is possible?"
 "It may be."
 "And what is your plan concerning me? I suppose you will advise me to 'skip' and leave my uncle in peace."
 "Yes."
 "I won't do it. You can arrest me as soon as you are in mind to do so; I've a little bomb to explode yet."
 "I wish to see justice done."
 "You do?"
 "Yes."
 "Can you do anything toward having justice done toward me?"
 "I think I can."
 "What can you do?"
 "Now I know all the facts, I will see Mr. Pladwell."
 "Well?"
 "I will find out if your tale is true."
 "All right; what then?"
 "If it is true, I will advise him to do what is right toward you."
 "And if he refuses?"
 "I will take your side of the case, and compel him to do what is just."
 "You appear to be a pretty good fellow, Tom Hawk."
 "I am."
 "So I've heard said, even by the men whom you have been running down."
 "They told you I was a man of my word?"
 "Yes."
 "All right, you can trust me; there are excuses for you. And now, if you are willing to stop right short in your bad career, you will come out all right, and I will help you."
 "You offer to become my friend?"
 "Yes, I do."
 "I accept your offer."
 "You are sincere?"
 "I am, I swear I am!"
 "All right, I will become your friend!"
 "And now what do you want me to do?"
 "Go to your lodging and remain there until I call for you to-morrow; do not leave the house under any pretense whatever."
 "You will come to see me?"
 "I will; and now no more to-night, but remember one thing, I am sincere; you have a good chance to come out all right, but if you attempt any crooked business you are a doomed man; no fellow can trifle with me."
 "I am satisfied of that, and glad to have won such a friend."
 "You owe my friendship to your misfortune; as I said, there is an excuse for you, but now that excuse ceases; you have a chance to become an honest man, and if you make one false move I'm down on you, and you will meet the consequence of all your evil deeds."
 "I swear I am only too glad of the chance of becoming an honest man; I became a rogue only after I learned of my own and my mother's wrongs."
 "You have a chance to prove that; good-night."
 Upon the morning following the incidents we have described, the detective went to see Miss Emily North, and his salutation was:
 "My dear child, I have great news for you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

The young lady upon hearing the detective's declaration permitted a bright, glad smile to beam all over her lovely face as she said:
 "You had promised me good news and I have waited for it ever since."
 "I have solved the mystery."
 "What mystery?"
 "The mystery of the double of your affianced."
 "And Charles?"
 "He is all that you have ever believed him to be, my dear child."
 "And is he safe?"
 "I have every reason to believe that he is safe."

"Tell me all."
 The detective proceeded and told the fair girl his strange story. He told her of all his many strange adventures and concerning all the suspicions he had indulged, and how he had moved on step by step on the track of Fell until he had come the witch game and learned the real truth.
 When the detective had concluded his startling narrative the girl said:
 "Why did you not demand an explanation from him when you first met and have saved all this anxiety?"
 "Ah, my dear child, you do not understand; it was necessary that I should prepare myself to listen to his story; and again, I had other business on hand, and it was necessary that I should run all the games together. It's all right. I was not taking any risks or losing any chances and I am the winner."
 "And Charles?"
 "Well, I shall find him."
 "Why not at once?"
 "Justice must first be done."
 "To whom?"
 "Henry Pladwell."
 "You are so good and wise, I can not question anything that you may propose."
 "I have a strange statement to make; I fear Mr. Pladwell, senior, is not a truly just man."
 The girl did not make an answer.
 "He is prejudiced against you."
 "Do not mind me in this matter."
 "Yes; I propose to take advantage of the position to compel that old gentleman to do the fair thing all round. And now, good-bye; you may not see me for a day or two. I only came to let you know that all was right. Charles Pladwell is a gentleman, and, I believe, a noble and generous young man, and, if he is right, all will come out right in the end."
 "If anything is left to the generosity of Charles, you may be assured all will certainly be right."
 "We shall see. Be patient, hopeful, and happy until you see me again; and now, Emily, good-morning."
 Tom Hawk proceeded to the Castle. He was mounted on his magnificent horse, Badger, and, as he rode over the mountain, it only needed that he should have been clad in mail to appear like a veritable knight of the middle ages.
 The detective soon reached the Castle, and was shown into the library, where, a few moments later, he was joined by Mr. Pladwell.
 The detective looked stern and solemn, while Mr. Pladwell attempted to act quite cheerful and chirpy; but it was plain to the visitor that he did not feel as he would make it appear.
 As he entered the room Mr. Pladwell exclaimed:
 "Have you come at last to tell me that you have caught the rascal?"
 "Yes, sir; I caught him a long time ago."
 "Is he in jail?"
 "Not yet."
 "He will be?"
 "I don't know yet. I thought I would come and see you first."
 "You could have spared yourself the trouble. I have no sympathy for him. The rascal has taken advantage of a fatal resemblance to inaugurate a cunning scheme; but I do not mean to be robbed—no, sir!"
 "He has told you his story?"
 "He has told me a story."
 "And you do not believe his tale?"
 "Certainly I do not; my brother was a gentleman. This resemblance is accidental; the story is concocted."
 "You really believe so, sir?"
 "Certainly I do."
 "I am really glad that you do; it accounts for your determination."
 "Yes, sir; I do not mean to be imposed upon by every rogue who chooses to come here and claim to be a relative!"
 "There is no doubt about this young man's relationship to you, sir."
 Mr. Pladwell turned pale, and exclaimed:
 "Has he made you a party to the fraud?"
 "No, sir. And now let me tell you, from the very first moment my eyes rested upon that young man, I was satisfied he was not your son, and was just as well satisfied that he was a relative, and that there was a mystery to be solved; and that is why I never arrested the youth."
 "And you think you have solved the mystery?"
 "Yes, sir. I have solved the mystery."

"If you believe his story, you have been imposed upon."
 "You think so?"
 "I do."
 "Mr. Pladwell, I know his tale to be true!"
 "How do you know it to be true?"
 "I have proved it!"
 "Ah! that alters the case!" said the owner of the Castle.

"I wouldn't permit you, sir, to be imposed upon by an impostor, and I determined to prove the young man's tale, and I gathered the real points before I permitted him to tell his story to me."

"Will you tell me how you have learned that his tale is true?"

"No, sir."

"Then I reserve the right to disbelieve it."

"I am sorry to hear you say it, sir!"

"Indeed, why?"

"Simply because you compel me to go over to the assistance of the young man."

"You may do that and not keep him out of prison. He made an attempt to rob this house. He made a murderous assault upon me. I can send him to prison."

"I admit that you can."

"His claims will not save him from going to prison."

"No, sir, nor will his going to prison save you from making an accounting of his father's former interest in your business. All he has to do is to prove that he is the legal heir of Henry Pladwell, and that he can do!"

"Never, sir!"

"My name is Tom Hawk, and I tell you I can prove it, and then you may be compelled to go to more trouble than a proper and just private settlement would cost."

"What am I to understand, sir?"

"You are to understand that this young man is to have his just rights."

"And I am also to understand that you become his champion?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you are the principal witness against him as a robber?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you seek to prevent his conviction?"

"No, sir; on the contrary, if I am compelled to arrest him, I will urge him to plead guilty."

"And then?"

"My plans are my own."

"And what do you ask me to do?"

"Leave the matter to your son."

"My son?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Never mind; will you leave the settlement to him?"

"I must consider the matter."

"I have one more request to make."

"You wish to make a demand on your own behalf, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what is it you desire?"

"Your son is engaged to marry a very estimable young lady, and I demand that you consent to the union."

"You demand it?"

"I do."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A MOMENT the master of the house paced the floor. He was evidently laboring under great agitation, and it was some time before he spoke; at length, however, he ejaculated:

"This is a terrible position for me."

"I thought you loved your son?"

"I do; and it is for his sake I am acting in this matter."

"You are acting for your son?"

"Yes."

"What is your purpose?"

"To save his name."

"Save his name?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I can not bring myself to acknowledge as a relative of a young man who is known as a thief—a common midnight burglar."

"Is it your name you are seeking to save and not your money?"

"I care nothing for the money!"

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so, sir."

"I speak the truth."

"Then listen to me; you are proposing just the course to bring disgrace upon your name."

"Can I not proclaim this young man an impostor?"

"And he can prove his claim."

"This is terrible."

"One moment, sir; listen to me."

The detective proceeded and presented the case of young Henry Pladwell in its true light. The master of the Castle listened to the end.

"I am your friend in this matter, sir, and the friend of your son."

"And you insist upon my consent to his marriage with this woman who is the consort and companion of a gang of thieves?"

"On the contrary, sir, she is a true and noble young woman."

The detective proceeded, and related all the circumstances as far as Miss North was concerned; and when he had concluded, Mr. Pladwell said:

"I am glad to hear all you have told me. I have been laboring under a great mistake all this time."

"Yes, sir; and now you must be careful that you do not commit a graver mistake."

"In refusing to settle with this young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I was fully convinced that he would become a worthy man, I would not hesitate a moment."

"You have heard his whole story?"

"Yes."

"All the particulars of his life, as far as he can relate them?"

"Yes."

"Then I have nothing to say; I leave this matter to your own conscience."

"I am willing to act under your advice."

"Wholly?"

"Yes."

"Enough. It will not take me long to decide?"

"And your decision is—"

"You shall have my decision in a few days—possibly hours."

"And when shall I see my son?"

"I will not render my decision until your son is present."

"And he is safe and well?"

"I have every reason to believe that he is; but you shall know all very speedily."

The detective left the room, mounted his horse, and rode away. He rode directly to the cottage where the young man Henry Pladwell lived. He found the young man awaiting his coming. Tom Hawk dismounted and motioned his protégé to follow. They walked to the grove where the talk had occurred the previous night.

"Where is your cousin?" demanded Night-Hawk.

"You mean Charles Pladwell?"

"Yes."

"Before I answer your question let me ask you what is the decision concerning myself?"

"I will answer no questions until I know where Charles Pladwell can be found."

"I expect him here to-day."

"Have you communicated with him?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all about it."

"Charles Pladwell has been sick in a public hospital. He was injured accidentally, and he has been lying in the hospital for over three months."

"How was he injured?"

"He was about sailing for South America, and was injured the day the ship was to have sailed."

"Did you have anything to do with the accident?"

"No, sir."

"You will swear to that?"

"I will."

"Why did he not communicate with his family?"

"I would not let him do so."

"How could you prevent it?"

"He was in a private hospital; all his letters were suppressed at my request."

"And that is why his folks have not heard from him?"

"Yes."

"And he will be here to-day?"

"Yes."

"He will come alone?"

"No; a friend will bring him to me."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"When do you expect them?"

"By the noon train."

"And now one word more; suppose your uncles settle with you, what are your intentions?"

"To leave the country."

"You will leave at once?"

"Yes."

"It is best."

"Yes, sir."

"You are liable to arrest here."

"I know that, sir."

"And again, your associates would never give you any peace; they would turn against you."

"I know that, sir."

"All right; you will receive the amount you claim."

"One hundred thousand?"

"Yes; but you will be compelled to sign a quit claim absolute."

"I will do it, and I shall always be thankful to you."

"You have every reason to be thankful to me; were it not for me you would be a criminal; were it not for me you would be in jail awaiting trial, or you would already be in prison for life."

"I will never forget your service."

"I will tell you how you can best repay it."

"How, sir?"

"Become an honest man."

"I will."

Later on in the afternoon Charles Pladwell arrived. The young man looked sick, but the resemblance between the two cousins was indeed most remarkable.

The cousins were introduced. A long explanation followed, and Charles and Henry Pladwell proceeded in company to the Castle.

The father and uncle and the detective met in the library. All matters were settled, and it was arranged that a meeting should take place in New York on the following day.

Henry Pladwell left the house, and after he had gone the detective summoned Charles into the parlor. When the young man had crossed the threshold the door was closed, and two glad cries sounded in the detective's ears.

Emily North was in the parlor awaiting her lover.

We will not relate what occurred, it is unnecessary; those scenes have been too often described.

Night-Hawk had performed the romantic part of his work well and he was present at the marriage of his protégés, Charles and Emily, and on the night of the marriage both thanked him for his noble work in their behalf.

Night-Hawk had an interview on the steamer dock a week later with a young man who was going to England, and many a word of good advice was dropped in the prospective passenger's ear.

Then our hero returned to the country to trace the gang, and his adventures will form the subject of another narrative.

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